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UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

FIRST COMMITTEE

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Nuclear Cluster Debate

Statement by John Quinn, Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva and Ambassador for Disarmament

Check against delivery

Mr Chairman

Australia is committed to the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons, pursued in an effective, determined and pragmatic way.

For Australia, reaching global zero is not only consistent with clear international obligations under Article VI of the NPT, but is also a key requirement for making the world a safer place.

Disturbing recent developments on the Korean Peninsula, including the two nuclear tests undertaken by the DPRK in 2016, provide a potent reality check for all of us. We call on the DPRK to abandon its

nuclear weapon and ballistic missile development programs. These programs pose a grave threat to global peace and security, and are in defiance of UN Security Council resolutions and the DPRK's other international obligations.

More broadly, the challenging security environment we face has been brought into stark focus at this First Committee, not least through the numerous rights of reply related to security concerns in South Asia, Eastern Europe, the Middle East and elsewhere. Dedicated and practical confidence building measures are needed in all these regions as a matter of priority.

Mr Chairman

Australia's position on the proposal before the committee to begin negotiations on a treaty banning nuclear weapons has been consistent and clear: we do not support such an approach.

A ban treaty would not rid us of one nuclear weapon. It would not change the realities we all face in a nuclear-armed DPRK, or tensions among major powers. And without the involvement of States possessing nuclear weapons, the practical value of negotiating a ban treaty is a questionable exercise.

Far from giving expression to Article VI commitments, we believe a ban treaty would do the opposite, creating parallel obligations, and thus ambiguity and potential confusion.

Indeed, we do not see the logic of a ban treaty for non-nuclear weapons states. Australia, as a party to the NPT and the Treaty of Rarotonga and has already twice

made legally binding commitments not to acquire or possess nuclear explosive devices. One is a commitment to which 191 states are party including the NWS, and the other is a regional commitment with our South Pacific neighbours.

Mr Chairman

It is axiomatic that States will only get rid of their nuclear arsenals when they feel it is safe to do so. Laying the ground work to eliminate such weapons requires much greater trust, more effective verification processes and assurance that capabilities for developing new weapons are not being used for that purpose.

Logical and indispensable next steps are the entry-into-force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), addressing the technical problems of verifying nuclear disarmament, and beginning negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT).

Australia is pleased to present, together with New Zealand and Mexico, this year's resolution on the CTBT. We are marking the 20th anniversary of the treaty and its verification system which has helped underpin an international de facto norm against nuclear testing. It is now more urgent than ever that the CTBT enter into force.

Australia welcomes the important Norwegian-led Nuclear Disarmament Verification draft resolution. This provides a practical means to build broader partnerships and cooperative verification arrangements, including addressing relevant technical challenges.

We must also realise the gains from last year's highly productive FMCT Governmental Group of Experts. We commend Canada's ongoing leadership on the FMCT and support its efforts to sustain momentum on this critical track of disarmament.

Mr Chairman

The Progressive Approach paper that Australia submitted to the OEWG and Disarmament Commission on behalf of 24 countries provided a number of recommendations on practical and achievable ways forward. We urge those possessing nuclear weapons to take the lead in implementing these proposals.

One such proposal calls for the nuclear armed states to enhance transparency with regard to their nuclear arsenals. This would contribute immediately and significantly to building confidence and laying the groundwork for a collective effort to reach global zero.

Mr Chairman

In conclusion, now more than ever is a critical time for us to protect and strengthen the NPT regime. We must seize the opportunity of the May 2017 NPT Preparatory Committee, to lay a solid foundation for a successful 2020 Review Conference.