Conference on Disarmament
Statement by Ambassador Peter Woolcott
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Australian Permanent Mission to the United Nations, Geneva
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Mr President,

I take the floor on behalf of Australia and Japan.

May I first take this opportunity to congratulate you on your Presidency of the Conference on Disarmament (CD) and to thank you for the manner in which you have guided the CD during your Presidency. You have set a high standard in your active and consultative approach.

Mr President,

Australia and Japan continue to support efforts to ensure that negotiations on the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) on the basis of the Shannon Mandate can begin in the CD as soon as possible through a CD work program.

To build confidence and momentum toward that longstanding goal of FMCT negotiations in the CD, Australia and Japan co-hosted in the Palais over the past three days an experts side event on the FMCT. This event was focused on possible definitions in the future treaty.

As I foreshadowed in the CD on 3 February, I chaired this event with the assistance of Dr Bruno Pellaud as Vice Chair and Rapporteur. And I again place on record my gratitude to Switzerland for facilitating Dr Pellaud’s participation in this event.

Mr President,

I shall provide a more detailed written report in my personal capacity to the CD at a future plenary meeting and hope that this may stimulate further substantive debate in plenary. But to summarise briefly:

On Monday, Mr Kevin Allred of the IAEA started the event with a presentation on the nuclear fuel cycle. This was followed by an exchange on how the term “fissile material” might be defined in the future FMCT.

On Tuesday, we continued our discussion with an exchange on how “production” might be defined in the treaty.
And yesterday, we concluded the event with a session which posed the open question of whether there were any other definitions which might be relevant for the future FMCT.

While the discussions did not reach any definitive answers – and that was not their purpose – they allowed us to delve into the issues in greater depth and bring out linkages between particular definitions and also between certain definitions and other core elements of the future treaty, including verification arrangements and scope.

Mr President,

Australia and Japan take this opportunity to thank all the CD member and observer states who participated in this experts side event. It was pleasing to see in attendance a substantial number of experts who in some cases had travelled from distant capitals. They enriched our discussions and understanding of this important topic.

Australia and Japan saw from this event a strong interest in FMCT among many CD member and observer delegations and a willingness to engage in sustained discussion on these issues.

We also saw a willingness to continue exploring elements of the FMCT through this format, as the CD continues its efforts to establish and implement a work program.

Noting again the Secretary-General’s suggestion here on 26 January in respect of fissile material – for “a basic process to educate each other and build trust which will inform and facilitate the formal process once the CD adopts its work programme”, Australia and Japan will now look to build on this experts side event and look to coordinate a second experts side event on the FMCT in the Palais in the near future, following further substantive debate in plenary. We will keep the CD informed in this regard.

Australia and Japan hope that these events will provide the building blocks and the confidence for future FMCT negotiations in the CD.

Thank you, Mr President.