Mr Chairman,

I congratulate you on your election as Chair of the First Committee during its 69th session. You can be assured of my delegation’s support.

Mr Chairman,

During this session of the UN General Assembly, we have already reached a milestone in the field of conventional weapons. On 25 September, we crossed the threshold of the 50 ratifications required to trigger the entry into force of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). On 24 December 2014, this historic Treaty will enter into force, and from this time our real work will begin. We want the ATT to make a difference where it matters most. We want it to effectively regulate international transfers of conventional arms and prevent illegal diversions to terrorist or criminal...
groups. To achieve this, the Treaty must be effectively implemented. This is something to which the Australian Government is firmly committed.

We look forward to the first Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty in 2015 and will work closely with Mexico, the other ATT co-authors, and other supporters to ensure it is successful.

The past year has also seen important progress in universalisation and implementation of the Convention on Cluster Munitions and the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. Recognising the tragic impact on civilians of cluster munitions and anti-personnel mines, Australia urges adherence to the international norms established by these Conventions. Australia welcomes the recent announcement by the United States of further changes to more closely align US activities outside the Korean Peninsula with the key requirements of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention.

Mr Chairman,

This year's First Committee is taking place at a delicate time in geopolitical relations with simmering tensions over Ukraine, the deteriorating humanitarian and military situation in Syria and Iraq, and ongoing Middle East tensions. These events remind us that we should work together to ensure that the United Nations
does not falter in realising its ambition for a more peaceful, stable and secure world.

Australia wishes to acknowledge the significant contribution over the past year made by the joint mission of the United Nations and the Organization for Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which completed its operations on 30 September. The joint mission deserves special recognition for completing the task of removing all of Syria’s declared chemical weapons under the most extraordinary and dangerous of circumstances. The OPCW finding of continued chemical weapons use in Syria in the form of chlorine attacks is deeply troubling. The international community must come together and respond to these attacks. Upholding the established norm against chemical weapon use must be our collective priority. Australia will continue working with others to ensure the total elimination of Syria’s chemical weapons capabilities and all associated facilities in full compliance with UNSC Resolution 2118.

Mr Chairman,

To remove the threat of nuclear war, we must create a world where the utility of nuclear weapons is greatly diminished. Our starting point has to be the inclusion of nuclear-armed States in the process of disarmament. We acknowledge that
some of the Nuclear Weapon States, especially the United States and Russia, have made considerable reductions in their nuclear arsenals. But two decades after the end of the Cold War, there are still more than 16,000 nuclear weapons held by nine States. Much more needs to be done. But, there can be no short-cuts to create the conditions necessary for a world without nuclear weapons.

To this end, Australia and fellow-members of the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI) have proposed practical steps that can contribute to greater nuclear transparency, further reductions in arsenals, and greater security of nuclear weapons and material. We welcome, as a first step, the nuclear-weapon States’ report to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) Preparatory Committee this year. But again, more detail and transparency in these reports are essential.

Mr Chairman,

The 2015 NPT Review Conference is fast approaching. We want that Review Conference to provide us with a solid outcome showing real and effective progress in disarmament.

Australia strongly supports the establishment of a Middle East zone free of all weapons of mass destruction, and on-going efforts to convene a conference at the
earliest opportunity. We call upon all States in the Middle East to engage in a spirit of genuine and constructive cooperation to make this happen.

Entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) remains a priority. Last month, Australia joined with other CTBT Friends States in co-hosting a Ministerial Meeting at which we committed to a strong statement of support for the CTBT’s prompt entry into force. We urge all countries yet to do so, to sign and ratify the CTBT without conditions. At this First Committee, Australia with Mexico and New Zealand will present our annual CTBT resolution. We invite all Member States to support and co-sponsor this year’s resolution, which reinforces the need, pending entry into force, to maintain a testing moratorium. This gives renewed expression to the Treaty’s central obligation and proposition: that nuclear weapon test explosions and other nuclear explosions should never occur again.

The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea is the only exception to the nuclear test moratorium in the 21st Century. This underscores the urgent need for the earliest entry into force of the Treaty.

In the meantime, we must bring to a halt any additions to nuclear weapons arsenals, and indeed reverse the quantity of them. The need for a treaty banning
production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices has long been recognised by the General Assembly. However, for too long the Conference on Disarmament has been unable to agree on a program of work and, more importantly, to fulfil its mandate to undertake disarmament negotiations. The issues surrounding nuclear disarmament are too important to be frustrated by a failure to even begin the negotiating process. Australia has consistently urged the Conference on Disarmament to begin negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty. Australia is an active participant in the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE), working with others to explore in a multilateral context the broad range of ingredients that would go into a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty. We are keen now to explore new ideas for moving forward with these negotiations.

Mr Chairman,

The challenges to international security are increasingly complex. We welcome the commencement of work by the GGE on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security, as mandated under Resolution 68/243. The elaboration of how international law applies to the conduct of states in cyberspace and the development of norms in relation to armed conflict, situations involving less than armed conflict, and in
peacetime are critically important tasks which go to the heart of international peace and security.

Mr Chairman,

Australia welcomes the considerable attention paid to the issue of space security over the last year. The safety, security and sustainability of the space environment should remain a key priority for all nations, given our increasing reliance on space for our prosperity and development. The recommendations of the UN GGE and the work of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) on long-term sustainability guidelines have provided fresh impetus and guidance for the development of space transparency and confidence-building measures. As before, Australia places a premium on practical and near-term steps to protect every nation’s access to the space environment. We see the proposed International Code of Conduct for Outer Space Activities as an appropriate means to realise the substantial work undertaken by the international community on space security in recent years.

Mr Chairman,
Australia looks forward to setting out in greater detail our views and ideas on a range of disarmament issues, including the importance of the equal, full and effective participation of women in disarmament processes. The thematic discussions will also provide an opportunity for us all to engage substantively to take the disarmament and non-proliferation agenda forward.

With your leadership I hope our collective focus will be on practical, realistic outcomes to benefit the international community and advance our common objectives of peace and stability.