Mr Chairman,

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

For Australia, reducing the numbers of nuclear weapons in the world is not only an international obligation under Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), but it is also a key requirement for making the world a safer place. Reducing the size of nuclear arsenals is in all our security interests.

Latest estimates from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) show that the total world inventory of nuclear warheads stood at around 16,300 in January 2014, down from 17,270 a year previously. This overall decline in the number of warheads is a welcome development, but most of the decline is due to warheads being removed from the two largest arsenals – those of the United States and Russia. Russia and the US still account for around 93 percent of the world’s nuclear weapons.

Of the States which account for the other seven percent of the world’s nuclear weapons, France and the UK have unilaterally reduced the size of their arsenals over recent years. But others are increasing the size of their arsenals. They are developing and deploying new nuclear warheads. This is very worrying.

I raise the issue of numbers of warheads because it is a key aspect of nuclear transparency. Australia and fellow-members of the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI) have consistently argued that transparency about nuclear arsenals and developments in nuclear weaponry is crucial for building confidence and setting baselines from which progress on nuclear reductions can be measured.

Transparency also helps the non-nuclear weapon States feel confident that they can monitor effectively the progress in reductions of arsenals. For these reasons, we
encourage all the P5 to be bold and more open about the size of their nuclear arsenals, and to show that they are making genuine and sincere efforts to reduce the size of these arsenals. Accurate and reliable information is a key component of building confidence and trust. Nuclear opacity however, is dangerous, can lead to miscalculation, and undermines the high-level political will necessary for effective progress in non-proliferation and disarmament.

We must also think about ways to include the non-NPT nuclear armed States in global moves towards greater nuclear transparency. For example, India and Pakistan could also submit regular reports on efforts they could take to reduce the size of their nuclear arsenals, and to build greater trust between them to enable this.

Another key concern is that some States are developing new, smaller, battlefield-deployable nuclear weapons, sometimes referred to as tactical nuclear weapons. This is particularly worrying because of the lower threshold for use of such weapons. Use of tactical nuclear weapons in a conflict would very likely escalate and could lead to a full scale nuclear exchange, which would be devastating for the States concerned, but also for the rest of the world.

Mr Chairman,

Australia welcomes the renewed focus on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. It is in recognition of the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons that Australia has been so active in promoting effective disarmament and non-proliferation over many years, and why we must continue to work tirelessly for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. But Australia has consistently argued that we need to address the security dimensions of why States possess nuclear weapons, and work building block by building block, step by step, or however one wants to characterise it, in order to strengthen the global non-proliferation and disarmament regime and make progress towards disarmament.

Nuclear disarmament is the responsibility of all States – although, understandably, States possessing nuclear arsenals have a particularly important role. Only these States can ultimately take the concrete steps required to eliminate nuclear weapons.

This is why Australia welcomes the continuing discussions by the five NPT nuclear-weapon States on their nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation commitments. We urge them to continue working to meet their commitments. We regard the reports presented by the nuclear weapon States to the NPT Preparatory Committee last May as a significant first step and encourage the nuclear weapon States to present even more transparent and detailed reports on the size of their nuclear arsenals and efforts they are taking to reduce them.

Mr Chairman,

We are collectively following a long and hard road, and there are no short cuts to achieving our goal of eventual nuclear disarmament. The steps we have already embarked on are the best and most promising means of achieving our goals.
These include entry-into-force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), and beginning negotiations for a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty. Banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons purposes is not an end in itself but a vital step towards irreversible nuclear disarmament. Australia considers the negotiation and early conclusion of such a treaty long overdue and supports strongly efforts to commence negotiations on such a treaty. Australia welcomes the work of the Group of Governmental Experts and looks forward to its recommendations on the elements of such a treaty. In the meantime, Australia continues to advocate for a moratorium on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. We also call on all States to continue to observe the moratorium on nuclear explosive testing, pending entry-into-force of the CTBT.

The convening of a conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction also continues to be a priority. Australia strongly supports the establishment of such a zone as an important way to address regional concerns and to fulfil a key recommendation of the 2010 NPT Action Plan. We call upon all the relevant States to expedite their efforts, in a spirit of cooperation and flexibility, with a view to delivering substantive outcomes towards the convening of the International Conference at the earliest opportunity.

Australia shares the concerns of the international community about the possible military dimensions of Iran’s nuclear program, and welcomes the ongoing discussions between Iran and the P5 + 1, and the work of the IAEA under the Framework of Cooperation with Iran. These are genuine moves towards making the world a more peaceful place: but the 24 November deadline is fast approaching and we encourage all parties to redouble their efforts to reach an agreement. It is incumbent on Iran to address international concerns about its nuclear activities and satisfy the world that it has no desire or design to produce nuclear weapons.

We also call on the DPRK to abandon its nuclear weapon and ballistic missile development programs. These activities pose a threat to regional and international peace and security, and are in defiance of UN Security Council resolutions and the DPRK’s other international obligations. We call on the DPRK to abide by all of its obligations, without conditions or delays, and also on the international community to assist in the enforcement of the relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

Mr Chairman,

Australia attaches great importance to the First Committee. It is a forum where we can harness positive developments, and build support for practical and concrete steps to strengthen efforts on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Only through such efforts will we achieve the shared goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.

Thank you.