

**Statement by the Hon Julie Bishop MP
Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade
Conference on Disarmament
26 March 2014**

Mr President, acting Secretary-General Moeller and distinguished Ambassadors.

It is a pleasure for me to speak to you today in the Conference on Disarmament. I am particularly pleased to acknowledge the current President of the Conference on Disarmament, Ambassador Toshio Sano.

The Conference on Disarmament has an honourable heritage.

It has done much in the past to contribute to a safer and more peaceful world.

But it has fallen on hard times.

I join a long line of ministers who have expressed to you their concern over the political paralysis that has prevented the conference from playing its proper role in international arms control.

UN Secretary-General Ban came here recently to express his concern over the Conference on Disarmament's impasse.

He said: "the pervasive cycle of pessimism in this body must be overcome or else the Conference on Disarmament will be overtaken by events."

And the UN Secretary-General is right.

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 world's patience is limited.

The issues surrounding nuclear disarmament are too important to be frustrated by a failure to even begin the negotiating process.

We must find a way forward within the Conference on Disarmament to further nuclear disarmament.

The political dynamics outside this chamber, and predominantly in countries most attached to the workings of the Conference on Disarmament, need to shift in a way that will allow it to resume its proper negotiating role.

And if these realities do not shift then the Conference on Disarmament will be swept into irrelevance.

We have seen recently how this frustration has fuelled a renewed global debate on the horrific human impact of nuclear weapons use and support in some quarters for a near-term nuclear weapons ban treaty.

It is our concern about the consequence for humanity of nuclear war, and a desire for a peace and stability of future generations, which underpin all that we do on disarmament and non-proliferation.

It underpins our efforts to put pressure on all states possessing nuclear weapons to move down the path of disarmament and in working to ensure these weapons do not proliferate.

It serves to educate a new generation, who never knew the Cold War nor the palpable fear of a nuclear conflict and its catastrophic consequences.

We need this generation to engage fully in the push to obtain a world without nuclear weapons.

But a near-term nuclear weapons ban treaty would not provide a short cut to some form of security nirvana.

We have to accept that the hard practical work necessary to bring us closer to a world free of nuclear weapons must still be done.

We need to work methodically – building block by building block – if we are going to attain the necessary confidence and transparency to bring about nuclear disarmament.

We need to bring the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) into force which will bind states to not conduct further nuclear explosive tests.

We need to negotiate a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) to prohibit further production of fissile material.

And we need the detailed consideration necessary to address the complex security, legal and other issues involved in getting from low numbers of nuclear weapons to zero.

And then of course to maintain that zero balance.

The nuclear weapons states must be engaged in this process for it to have any practical impact.

Otherwise it is a distraction from our real business – making the world safer.

We have to acknowledge the security dimensions of nuclear weapons.

Effective disarmament is only possible when those States who possess nuclear weapons feel more secure without nuclear weapons than with them.

We must create a world where the utility of nuclear weapons is greatly diminished, both for the nuclear-armed states and those who still rely on their extended deterrence.

Our starting point is that the key actors in the process of disarmament have to be those who possess nuclear weapons.

We acknowledge that some of the Nuclear Weapon States, especially the United States and Russia, have made considerable reductions in their nuclear arsenals.

The results of the New START Treaty are impressive.

Moreover, significant progress has been made in eliminating 500 tonnes of weapon-origin highly-enriched uranium (HEU), including through the implementation of the 1993 US-Russia purchase agreement “Megatons-to-Megawatts”.

Up to 10 percent of electricity production in the US has been generated from repurposed nuclear fuel during the last twenty years.

We also recognise that the United Kingdom and France have made welcome progress in reducing their nuclear arsenals.

We applaud these efforts.

But the international community expects each of the P5 and other nuclear-armed states to do much more, and to show a genuine commitment to nuclear transparency.

Australia remains utterly committed to this endeavour.

Australia has consistently urged the Conference on Disarmament to begin negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty.

Fissile material is the raw material for nuclear weapons.

Ceasing production of fissile material for nuclear weapons purposes is fundamental to nuclear arms control.

Negotiating a treaty to end the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons purposes is the next logical and vital step in the long road towards ridding the world of nuclear weapons.

Agreeing on a program of work and commencing negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty would reinvigorate the Conference on Disarmament, and restore global confidence in this organisation.

Another important opportunity to advance the treaty will be at the meeting of the Group of Government Experts (GGE) in Geneva later this month.

Australia will be an active participant in the 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.

Mr President

In 2010, 189 States agreed by consensus on an elaborate action plan which covered nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation, and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

The 2015 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference, and its final preparatory meeting which begins next month (28 April), will allow us to consider the implementation of the 2010 plan in detail.

Our efforts at this point should be focussed on this action plan.

We need to think hard about what we can achieve, in a realistic and constructive way.

The good health of the NPT should be a fundamental goal for the overwhelming majority of us.

We want the 2015 Review Conference to provide us with a solid outcome.

The NPT is the global treaty level commitment to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

Australia and fellow-members of the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI) have been working in advance of the NPT Preparatory Committee, on proposing practical steps that can contribute to greater nuclear transparency, further reductions in arsenals, and greater security of nuclear weapons and material.

I will be joining my fellow Minister from the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative at Hiroshima on 11 and 12 April to finalise NPDI positions on many of these issues.

Our goal is to ensure the NPT Review Conference in 2015 is a success, and shows real, effective progress in disarmament.

Much work has been done to reduce nuclear arsenals since the end of the Cold War.

But there is a strong feeling among the non-nuclear weapons states, and among members of the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative, that countries like Russia and the United States need to commit to further deep reductions in their nuclear arsenals.

That includes strategic and non-strategic, deployed and non-deployed nuclear weapons.

There will be a strong expectation at the NPT Preparatory Committee that the P5 will demonstrate this commitment and put forward a realistic, transparent timeframe for further reductions.

Under the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the P5 have made a very clear commitment, which is often characterised as the Grand Bargain: whereby the Nuclear Weapons States will get rid of their nuclear arsenals in return for the rest of the world not developing nuclear weapons.

And the whole world can share in the benefits of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

But if there is no progress in the Conference on Disarmament, and no greater commitments from the Nuclear Weapons States to do more in moving towards nuclear disarmament, this Grand Bargain could be at risk.

Failing to do more risks undermining the existing non-proliferation and disarmament infrastructure.

And failing to do more risks encouraging those states which desire nuclear weapons but do not yet possess them, to work around international non-proliferation regimes to achieve their goals.

There is also the legitimate interest of non-nuclear weapon states in receiving unequivocal and legally binding security assurances against the threat of use of nuclear weapons.

Nuclear-weapon-free-zones, including in the Middle East, are also important means for enhancing global and regional peace and security.

Mr President

I encourage members of the Conference on Disarmament to redouble their efforts to overcome the obstacles which are preventing it from agreeing to a program of work.

I also encourage all P5 and other nuclear-armed states to redouble their efforts to reduce their nuclear arsenals, and to be more transparent about what they are doing to meet their commitments to achieve effective nuclear disarmament.

Former US President Reagan had a way of putting complex issues with simplicity and clarity.

Thirty years ago, in his 1984 State of the Union Address he said: “A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. The only value in our two nations possessing nuclear weapons is to make sure they will never be used. But then, would it not be better to do away with them entirely?”

Our answer must unequivocally be yes.

And this sentiment should drive us all, in particular those states that possess nuclear weapons, to make sustained and practical progress to this end.