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Joint Statement on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons

Delivered by Ambassador John Quinn, Australian Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Geneva and Ambassador for Disarmament

Mr Chairman,

I take the floor on behalf of Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, and Spain.

The renewed global focus on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons has re-energised concerns about the horrific consequences for humanity that would result from the use of a nuclear weapon, a major nuclear weapons accident, or a terrorist attack involving fissile material. It is our concern about the continuing nuclear risks to humanity, and a desire for a peaceful future for successive generations, which underpins our long-standing advocacy for effective progress on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, particularly through the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

We stress the significance of spreading awareness of the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons across borders and generations. In order to foster further momentum for achieving a world free of nuclear weapons, we need this generation – especially in nuclear-armed States - to fully comprehend why we must resolutely strive for a world without nuclear weapons. It is in this context that we welcome the statement delivered by New Zealand on behalf of a large number of countries on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. It is in the interests of the very survival of humanity that nuclear war must never occur.

We acknowledge that there have been significant reductions in the number of nuclear weapons worldwide since the end of the Cold War. However, more than 16,000 nuclear warheads still exist, many on high alert status. It is also regrettable that some states possessing nuclear weapons continue to produce new nuclear weapons.

It is therefore crucial that all States more resolutely and urgently fulfil their disarmament commitments and work to ensure these weapons are not used and do not proliferate. At the same time, eliminating nuclear weapons is only possible through substantive and constructive engagement with those states which possess nuclear weapons.

To create the conditions that would facilitate further major reductions in nuclear arsenals and eventually eliminate them requires the global community to cooperate to address the important security and humanitarian dimensions of nuclear weapons. It will also require effort to further reduce levels of hostility and tension between States - particularly between those possessing nuclear weapons - and to pursue confidence-building measures (CBMs) such as enhanced transparency of existing nuclear arsenals and a reduced role for nuclear weapons in military doctrines. We note with disappointment the current

increased tensions between nuclear weapon states and encourage them to continue to nevertheless seek to further CBMs and nuclear arsenal reductions.

We must simultaneously advance non-proliferation and disarmament as mutually reinforcing processes and create a more peaceful world. Practical contributions we can make would be to unblock the world's key disarmament negotiating forum, the Conference on Disarmament; begin negotiations for a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty; and bring into force the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Nuclear Weapon States must make efforts to achieve further cuts in their nuclear arsenals as soon as possible, de-alert nuclear warheads and reduce the role and significance of nuclear weapons in their defence doctrines. They should also commit to cease production of any new nuclear weapons. The International Atomic Energy Agency's powers of inspection, verification and reporting on global proliferation risks must also be strengthened.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is the cornerstone for progress towards total nuclear disarmament.

As agreed in Article VI of the NPT a multilateral framework or treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control will have to be negotiated to underpin a world without nuclear weapons. But 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 and with realism if we are going to attain the necessary confidence and transparency to bring about nuclear disarmament. There are no short cuts.

We look forward to a productive and inclusive discussion at the Third Conference on the Humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons in Vienna which should contribute to a successful outcome of the NPT Review Conference in 2015.

Thank you.