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Joint Statement on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons

Statement by John Quinn, Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Geneva

Mr Chairman,

I have the honour to take the floor on behalf of Canada, the Netherlands, Germany, Hungary, Denmark, Estonia, Luxembourg, Spain, Latvia, Poland, Lithuania, Iceland, Finland, Greece, Belgium, Romania, Croatia, Bulgaria, Japan, Slovenia, Slovakia, Italy, Georgia, Portugal, the Czech Republic, the Republic of Korea, Ukraine, and my own country, Australia.

The renewed global focus on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons has reenergised concerns about the horrific consequences for humanity that would result from a nuclear weapon detonation 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 emphasise 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 the younger generation – especially in nuclear-armed States - to comprehend fully why we must resolutely strive for a world without 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.

Creating the conditions that would facilitate further major reductions in nuclear arsenals and eventually eliminating 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 more actively 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 ongoing tensions between nuclear weapon states and encourage them to continue nevertheless to 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, building on the work of the UN Group of Government Experts' meetings; and bring into force the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty as part of a series of steps aimed at achieving the total elimination of nuclear weapons. The entry into force of the CTBT is, in particular, overdue, given that next year will mark the 20th anniversary since its adoption by this Assembly.

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. In this context, we welcome initiatives to develop a better understanding of the complexities of international nuclear disarmament verification.

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

While a treaty banning nuclear weapons is probably necessary to maintain a world without nuclear weapons, such a treaty now will not get us to global zero. 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, including a focus on not just humanitarian but also security considerations. There are no short cuts.

We stand ready to work with others to build upon the momentum created by the conferences on the humanitarian consequences, be it in the format of an OEWG or otherwise, to discuss next steps. We need to be realistic and inclusive as we undertake this task, including maintaining an open mind, without prior assumptions about outcomes. Above all, we should aim to promote areas of agreement in relation to the humanitarian consequences discourse, rather than accentuate the differences, as it is only through finding a common way forward that we can reach our shared goal of a world without nuclear weapons.