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**Conference on Disarmament  
Australian Statement  
29 January 2019**

Mr President

It is not easy being the first President for the year in the Conference on Disarmament. Your Presidency sets the tone and establishes the framework for our collective work this year. You have our full support. We also extend our welcome to new colleagues.

We approach this year with a mix of optimism and realism about what is possible for the CD in 2019.

The issues we work on go to the heart of national and international security concerns. None of this is easy, and we are kidding ourselves if we think that real, sustainable progress can be packaged neatly into the CD's rather short annual sessions.

The CD is one of many tools at our disposal for managing international security challenges. It is up to the people in this room to use it wisely and effectively.

This takes time – building trust and confidence through dialogue over many years.

Mr President

In 2018, despite some disappointments, the CD arguably did more substantive work than it has done in years. Turkey outlined this well in its statement last week.

Several delegations have already indicated a desire to build on this work in 2019. We support this.

We thank you for your intention to put forward a draft program of work later this week. We look forward to consultations on the draft. We commend your intention to reference the work of the subsidiary bodies.

Mr President

It is worth reflecting on some of the thoughtful suggestions proposed in statements last week and today.

We were particularly struck by the Netherlands excellent suggestion that we consider reframing how we see a “program of work”. There is no reason that a schedule of activities cannot be a program of work – with ad hoc bodies established as required. It worked well this way in the past. Chile also made sensible suggestions this morning describing a program of work as a methodological tool.

A “comprehensive, balanced program of work” has become somewhat of an unattainable myth.

It is common sense that balance will be needed in any PoW that is agreed. For example, Australia's priority is to start negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons– but others have different priorities – and compromise is needed to make progress. Brazil made the important point just now about avoiding cross-conditionality in a program of work.

Mr President

We were also encouraged by suggestions that the CD can do useful work in developing less than treaty status documents. Both China and the EU made this useful suggestion.

However we decide to structure our work in 2019 – it is clear that the focus must be on substance. This is what the SBs did in 2018 and it worked well. We need to continue in this vein. We note Finland's useful suggestion of targeted questions to guide our work. ROK made a similar point of more focused discussions moving away from general statements.

Everything we did last year is work we would need to do if we were in a negotiation. Building dialogue, looking for commonalities is essential pre-negotiation work to get us ready for when actual negotiations are possible.

Mr President

We were also pleased to hear several delegations suggest a focus on working methods, and highlighting the importance of incorporating

gender perspectives in our work. Greater diversity strengthens our community, and will lead to more sustainable outcomes.

Mr President

We welcome the US focus on compliance with arms control agreements. Indeed accountability and compliance challenges are at the heart of the difficult problems we face.

The INF Treaty is an important part of the nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament architecture, so it is disturbing to note the lack of progress in addressing long-standing concerns about Russian non-compliance with INF Treaty obligations.

Australia encourages Russia to engage constructively with the US and return to compliance with its obligations.

Thank you