2018 Preparatory Committee of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

General Statement by Canada

Mr. Chair,

At the outset, allow me to congratulate you on your election and assure you of my delegation’s full support.

Since the advent of nuclear weapons, the international community has developed a range of multilateral institutions, treaties, and other legal frameworks to help limit the spread of these devastating arms, and work toward their elimination. Since 1970, the NPT has been the cornerstone of the non-proliferation and disarmament regime, producing a number of considerable achievements across each of its three pillars. Notably, it has helped to limit the number of states possessing nuclear weapons, enshrine the right of States parties to the peaceful use of nuclear energy under robust safeguards, and provide a legal basis on which to pursue nuclear disarmament.

While this second session of the Preparatory Committee affords us an opportunity to reflect on the accomplishments of the NPT, we must also take stock of new challenges that threaten further progress. Today, States parties face an array of troubling developments which threaten to increase the risk of nuclear weapons use, and limit the effectiveness of multilateral diplomacy in this sphere. These challenges are well known to the delegations represented here in Geneva.

Despite encouraging diplomatic prospects in recent months, North Korea’s drive to enhance its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile program remains one of the foremost challenges to the global non-proliferation regime, both in terms of its continued violation of its NPT obligations and successive UNSC resolutions, as well as the risk of its possible transfers of nuclear weapons-related materials and knowledge to other state and non-state actors. In other domains, confidence in nuclear diplomacy has been undermined by continued uncertainty surrounding the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran, and the erosion of longstanding bilateral arms control and security agreements, such as the Russian violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. More broadly, we have seen a resurgence in great power competition, which threatens to reignite the kinds of arms races and zero-sum thinking rightly abandoned long ago.

While recognizing today’s precarious international security environment, we remain convinced that meaningful action to strengthen the NPT’s three pillars remains achievable. These new challenges only further underline the need for urgent action. As we look toward the 2020 Review conference, which will mark the 50th anniversary of this important treaty, it is imperative that we move forward with a spirit of constructive engagement necessary to ensure a productive outcome.

For its part, Canada remains committed to advancing inclusive, practical initiatives aimed at halting the spread of nuclear weapons, and working toward their eventual elimination. In particular, Canada is proud to lead the United Nations’ High-Level FMCT Experts Preparatory Group, which is making good progress in developing a full range of options for the eventual negotiation of a treaty banning fissile material production. In concert with our partners in the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative, Canada also promotes increased transparency by all States parties on their commitments under the NPT, including the reporting by nuclear weapon states on their nuclear arsenals. In addition, Canada continues to match its diplomatic
engagement with substantial financial contributions supporting our non-proliferation and disarmament objectives, including through our WMD Threat Reduction Program, which allocates over $36M in annual funding to support projects across each of the NPT’s three pillars.

As we explore new ways to strengthen the Treaty in the current review cycle, Canada underlines that inclusion should guide the engagement of states in all aspects of our work. By necessity, inclusion requires ensuring representation of both women and men, not only in the composition of delegations, but in substantive perspectives on key issues under the NPT, and on other matters of international security. Canada will strive to ensure that the values of inclusion and equal representation are promoted in all aspects of its engagement on NPT issues, and we encourage all delegations to do the same. In this vein, we are working hard to better incorporate gender-based analysis in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of all WMD-related programming. We commend last year’s PrepCom Chair, the Netherlands, for capturing discussions on gender, representation, and women in disarmament in paragraphs 7 and 135 of the Chair’s factual summary.

It is clear that States parties remain divided on the best ways to pursue our common interests under this Treaty, particularly on issues of nuclear disarmament. However, in order to improve prospects for the future, we cannot merely paper over areas of disagreement, or brush aside grievances over the pace of progress. Rather, to secure consensus at the 2020 RevCon, we must begin to work to build trust and confidence, and seek to find common ground where divisions remain.

Canada’s security, like that of our NATO Allies, relies on nuclear deterrence. This should not, however, serve as a disincentive for action. Indeed, we do not believe that appropriate nuclear deterrence on one hand precludes reciprocal, step-by-step disarmament on the other. Within the current strategic context, much more can be done to limit nuclear threats, and reduce arsenals.

The 2020 review cycle presents us with a valuable opportunity to improve the global discourse, and chart a more action-oriented course at a time when such progress is greatly needed. It is our hope that together, through a spirit of genuine collaboration, NPT States parties can use this second PrepCom to advance prospects for a safer world, a strengthened Treaty, and a more robust multilateral system.

Thank you