[Please check against delivery]

Thank you Mr President,

A huge thank you to team Argentina for the hard work and persistence during your Presidency.

As part of the P6+2 we saw your commitment up close. It has been a privilege to be part of a team approach in 2020.

Mr President

As the incoming CD President, we are acutely aware of the rapid developments and fluid situation with respect to COVID19.

The health of delegates is our top priority.

The P6 is monitoring the situation and will work with the Secretariat to assess whether we need to put in place additional modifications to our meeting practices.


I ask delegates to follow the guidance, which includes:

Please do not attend the CD if you are unwell, have a fever, cough or respiratory symptoms.

Please undertake regular preventive measures such as cough etiquette and regular handwashing.
While CD meetings take place on UN premises, the responsibility rests with the meeting organisers to decide whether to proceed with meetings, and what measures to take to minimise risk. For the next few weeks, we will hold CD plenaries in Room 20 to allow greater distance between delegates.

If necessary, we may postpone plenary meetings and hold additional plenaries in the second half of our Presidency.

We would welcome views from delegates.

Mr President

Australia takes on the role of CD President with a sense of responsibility and a duty of care for the institution.

That duty of care requires us to take responsibility for steering this body in a positive way on a path to negotiations.

The P6 put forward three options for a package for the CD’s work in 2020.

We regret that consensus on these was not possible – but it is time to move on and use the time we have to focus on substance.

The P6+2 have come up with a coordinated schedule for plenary meetings for the rest of 2020. We will provide the schedule to CD members shortly, through the Secretariat.

Proposed plenary sessions will cover all CD agenda items, and the improved and effective functioning of the Conference. We will also continue consultations on a Program of Work.

We want CD members and observers to know what we will discuss well in advance, so you have time to prepare and engage actively during the sessions.

We encourage you to consider submitting working papers and relevant documents to help frame discussions.
Mr President

As part of the coordinated P6 schedule, Australia will hold at least four thematic plenaries.

These will focus on agenda items one to three, and on the improved and effective functioning of the Conference.

**Our first plenary on 17 March** (subject to COVID19 developments) will focus on nuclear disarmament verification, including the UN Group of Government Experts report.

We encourage delegates to consider the GGE report, and its various working papers, and ways the CD could work on nuclear disarmament verification.

Future multilateral negotiation on nuclear disarmament will need to include verification, so it is critical that this body has thought deeply about how to do this.

Our second plenary will focus on nuclear risk reduction with a panel followed by interactive discussion.

In 2018 delegations agreed in subsidiary body two that further discussions on nuclear risk reduction would be welcome - we are taking that up.

We encourage delegates to consider what role the CD could usefully play in understanding and reducing nuclear risks.

After the NPT RevCon, we will host a plenary discussion on reducing security risks in outer space.

This will be an opportunity to share national approaches to managing security risks in outer space. We want to work with all nations to build an international consensus on responsible space behaviours and hope that we can explore this theme.

Our final plenary will focus on the improved and effective functioning of the Conference. This is not a new topic for the CD and in light of challenges in fulfilling the CD’s negotiating mandate, it is important to
examine critically whether there are ways we could be more effective. Some ideas may be modest but make a difference to the way we work, for example enhanced P6+2 coordination this year has made a difference.

Colleagues

Australians are not big on formalities. There is no need to congratulate me for assuming the presidency of the CD. We trust we have your support.

One thing that is important to us is gender equality. Currently the CD’s rules of procedure do not reflect this principle.

During our presidency, we will propose technical amendments to the CD’s rules of procedure to make them gender neutral.

We know there is caution about opening up the rules of procedure and this is not what we are doing.

We ask all delegations to support these technical amendments in support of gender equality.

Mr President,

We said a couple of weeks ago that two presidencies was enough time to spend on this year’s package proposal for a program of work.

We will not continue plenary discussions on it – but we are proud of the package and it remains on the table.

We are available to any delegations who wish to meet us to discuss a program of work for the CD.

Thank you