Conference on Disarmament  
Australian Statement  
10 March 2020

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Mr President

Australia welcomes your commitment to gender equality and diverse perspectives in the Conference on Disarmament (CD). We thank Argentina for circulating its non-paper, which we will give our close attention.

International Women’s Day commemorates the political, economic and social achievements of women. We reflect on progress made, call for increased focus, but more importantly, we should all ask ourselves – what more can we do? Treaties this body negotiated should benefit everyone, so it stands to reason that we should ensure all voices not only speak, but are heard.

Mr President

Colleagues have rightly referred to resolution 1325 and the Beijing declaration.

Why do we think it is important to increase the role of women in international security including in the Conference on Disarmament?

And the answer is quite simple - diversity leads to better outcomes for disarmament and arms control, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and development.

Mr President

Allow me to talk briefly about an Australian woman who wrote and spoke in the 1930s and 1940s. Her name was Jessie Street. She focused in particular on helping women enter every aspect of the workforce. And in 1945, Jessie Street attended the foundation conference of the United
Nations, the only woman in the Australian delegation. In doing so, she became the first Australian female delegate to the UN.

So although from a different generation, I clearly feel a connection to the issues Jessie Street championed. But the singular reason bringing the legacy of Jessie Street to this meeting, is that it was Jessie, who was instrumental in ensuring the passage of a clause in the UN charter forbidding gender discrimination.

Today, we see some great examples, that of not just forbidding discrimination, but of genuinely effective and inclusive participation. The UN itself is setting an excellent example with women in key leadership positions – including the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms Izumi Nakamitsu, and the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Ms Tatiana Valovaya.

Our inaugural Ambassador for Arms Control and Counter-Proliferation, Her Excellency Ms Amanda Gorely, will be in Geneva during Australia’s presidency of this conference to pursue practical outcomes that we can build on at the upcoming NPT Review Conference. We encourage delegations to this conference and the NPT Review Conference to ensure inclusive participation which we know can help achieve better outcomes.

Mr President

We are pleased to see positive developments in the past year to raise the profile of gender equality and support for mainstreaming the WPS agenda across all disarmament and arms control fora.

UNIDIR is doing excellent research, and the work of the International Gender Champions Disarmament Impact Group has led to a terrific resource pack of use to all delegates.

Australia acknowledges the concrete progress made across key disarmament conventions such as the Arms Trade Treaty and the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, as well as increased attention on gender diversity, inclusion and analysis at the UN General Assembly First Committee and NPT preparatory meetings.

Mr President
We would like to thank Germany for holding the inaugural Gender Equality Network for Small Arms Control Conference in Berlin in February to examine best practice in making small arms control more gender responsive. This is an excellent initiative.

We can – and must do more – to integrate gender perspectives in the work of the CD, and to foster a more inclusive institutional culture.

We intend to lead by example when we take on the Presidency next week, including through suggesting how we can make the CD’s rules of procedure gender neutral.

Mr President

If we value this body, if it is to deliver on the substantial challenges before it, we must work together to deliver inclusive leadership as the norm.