Thank you Mr President,

First, I would like to take this opportunity to express our deepest sympathies to those who have lost loved ones and suffered hardships during the Covid-19 pandemic, and our solidarity with all countries that have been affected. The challenge the world faces in responding to Covid-19 is exceptional and unprecedented. There has never been a more critical and challenging time for the international community to work together.

Secondly, I would like to congratulate Ambassador Mansfield and the delegation of Australia on their Presidency. Although the circumstances dictated that we were unable to meet, we are grateful to them for using the time to consult widely on how to make the CD work more effectively and we are grateful for their efforts. We welcome the statement delivered earlier by Ambassador Mansfield and the many good suggestions for taking forward our work, which we will study closely.

Thirdly, I would like to congratulate you, Mr President, on Austria’s assumption of the Presidency. My delegation stands ready to work with you and we offer you our full support. In particular, I would like to thank you, your team, the P6+2, and our colleagues from the CD Secretariat and the UN Office at Geneva for the huge effort that has gone into ensuring that the CD could actually meet today.

And fourthly, allow me to join others in welcoming our new colleagues, the Ambassadors of Argentina, the Republic of Korea, and Tunisia.

Mr President,

In your letter of 12 June, you said that the enforced three-month break was a good moment for reflection. While we have lost a lot of time, and the postponement of the NPT Review Conference in particular was a notable setback, it is right that we must use this hiatus to reset our work. In all walks of life, the crisis makes us realise what
we value most. If it emphasises the importance of international co-operation in the face of our severest and most intractable problems, then it also underlines the value of this Conference. I hope that the resumption of our work today can see the start of a new spirit of collaboration.

That is why we particularly valued the consultation exercise carried out by the Australian Presidency. We welcome your commitment to continue this exercise. We should use the time remaining to us in this session to reflect on the results of the consultation exercise, as set out earlier by the Australian delegation, both through further consultations by the President and through discussion in our plenary meetings either side of the summer break. In this way we could profitably use this truncated 2020 session. While we understand the challenges, we hope the remaining Presidencies can revisit the idea of setting out their plans for the remainder of the session, to allow delegations to plan accordingly.

In the hope then that we will have other opportunities to do so, Mr President, I will refrain from going into detail on my delegation’s views on the state of play today. Allow me for now just to echo what Ambassador Mansfield said in her statement about the need to interpret this Conference’s negotiating mandate broadly, flexibly and creatively; just because this body has the authority to negotiate, does not mean we cannot do other things that will progress our objectives. We also echo what Ambassador Mansfield said about the need to approach apparently intractable problems in a different way, from the ground up, and through a variety of types of instrument. This is particularly the case on space, where the need to address threats to operations in outer space is increasingly important, and where a focus on a comprehensive treaty on military capabilities relating to space risks blinding us to opportunities to tackle a range of discrete issues that would contribute to the safety and security of outer space, and the stability and prosperity of Earth.

Finally for now, Mr President, I would like to register my delegation’s support for the proposal made by the Australian Presidency for a technical amendment to the Rules of Procedure to render the language gender neutral. These changes are long overdue, and we hope they will command consensus in this Conference.

Thank you once again for convening us today, Mr President, and I look forward to further fruitful discussions in the time remaining to us in this session.