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**Conference on Disarmament
Australian Statement Celebrating
International Women's Day on 8 March 2021**

Thank you, Mr President.

On behalf of Australia, I would like to assure you of my delegation's support as you guide us through discussions on the draft program of work. We appreciate your constructive and consultative approach to the task at hand.

Mr President

Today, 8 March, marks International Women's Day – a day on which we celebrate the political, economic and social achievements of women. This year's International Women's Day theme is *Women in Leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world*.

Promoting women's leadership and the principles of gender equality is something we should do every day rather than being reminded of it once a year. I would like to re-affirm Australia's commitment to gender equality and pay tribute to the courageous leadership of all women who have contributed to the work of our conference. And to those men who have also driven and supported this objective. We do so in order to get the best outcomes – diversity means a richness of views and better outcomes.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to exacerbate existing gender inequalities due to strains on healthcare systems, increased economic stressors, greater political and economic insecurity, and rising gender-based violence.

Notwithstanding the common challenges we face in this new COVID-normal, this is an opportune time to take the transformative action required to achieve diverse and inclusive participation in the work of our conference.

Mr President

Gender equality is a key value and top foreign policy priority for Australia. We are taking proactive steps towards the full and inclusive participation of

women in international fora, including in the field of disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation.

We are doing this through our global advocacy championed by Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Women, Senator the Hon Marise Payne, our Ambassador for Arms Control and Counter-Proliferation, Ms Amanda Gorely, and our Ambassador for Gender Equality, Ms Julie-Ann Guivarra.

Research shows that more diverse teams make better decisions. However, the statistics provided by UNIDIR, UNODA and the Disarmament Impact Group, show that, in this regard, we have a significant way to go in this conference. We strongly encourage all delegations to strive for inclusive representation of women in their teams.

Mr President

Delegations will recall Australia's proposal for a technical amendment to make the CD's Rules of Procedure gender-neutral. It is one way we can all take a practical step towards making our conference more equitable and representative of the diverse voices that contribute to its work.

In the words of the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Ms Tatiana Valovaya, such a change should be 'as automatic as correcting a spelling mistake'.

It is a small, but essential and symbolic, step that would allow us to make the CD inclusive by design. Let's make 2021 the year that we get this done.

Thank you, Mr President.