Mr. Chairman,

I would like today to discuss the views of the United States on nuclear disarmament. I will describe our fundamental approach, what we have accomplished in recent years and our current objectives, and some more long-range questions as we consider how to create, in the words of Security Council Resolution 1887, “the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons, in accordance with the goals of the [NPT].”

As President Obama noted in his statement at the summit meeting of the Council, the United States is pursuing a new agreement with Russia to “substantially reduce our strategic warheads and launchers.” We are also seeking ratification of the CTBT and “deeper cuts in our own arsenal.” We look forward to the start of FMCT negotiations in January and to an NPT Review Conference that strengthens the operation of that agreement.

Our negotiators are engaged in intensive negotiations with their Russian counterparts in Geneva on a treaty to replace the START Treaty regime and to enact further cuts in delivery systems and warheads. The new treaty will enhance stability and predictability in our two countries’ strategic relationship while reducing deployed nuclear warheads. Once we have reached an agreement, we will of course notify the international community about its terms.

In the meantime, Mr. Chairman, let me discuss some aspects of what the United States has done in nuclear arms control in recent years. For some of you, this may be old news, but since we are often challenged to state what we have accomplished, it may bear repeating.

As far as strategic weapons are concerned, the START Treaty reduced U.S. and Russian deployed strategic warheads from well over 10,000 to 6,000 each by the end of 2001. This year, the U.S. met its Moscow Treaty reduction obligation and now has fewer than 2,200 operationally deployed strategic nuclear warheads.

In the area of non-strategic, or tactical, nuclear weapons, the United States, in consultation with its NATO allies, retired all U.S. nuclear artillery shells, nuclear warheads for short-range ballistic missiles, and naval nuclear anti-submarine
warfare weapons. All of these weapons were dismantled by 2003. These actions reduced U.S. non-strategic nuclear weapons in NATO by nearly 90 per cent.

The United States also has retired over 1,000 strategic ballistic missiles, 350 heavy bombers, and 28 ballistic missile submarines. Four modern Ohio-class ballistic missile submarines, carrying a total of 96 Trident missiles, have been removed from strategic service.

In 2004, in addition to the Moscow Treaty reductions in operationally deployed strategic nuclear warheads, the United States decided to reduce the number of warheads in the overall U.S. nuclear stockpile, including both deployed and non-deployed warheads. By 2012 or sooner, the U.S. nuclear stockpile will be reduced by nearly one-half from its 2001 level and three-quarters from its 1990 level, resulting in the smallest stockpile since the 1950s.

The United States has also stepped up the pace of warhead elimination. We are already below the levels in our active stockpile that we had planned to reach in 2012, and we are retiring an additional 15 per cent of the stockpile below this planned level.

Mr. Chairman,

The United States is also making significant progress to eliminate fissile material. The United States has not enriched uranium for use in nuclear weapons since 1964, and we have not produced plutonium for nuclear weapons since 1988. We have no plans to produce these materials for use in nuclear weapons in the future. Since 1994, we have removed more than 374 metric tons of highly enriched uranium (HEU) and 61.5 metric tons of plutonium from use in nuclear weapons. Taken together, these removals account for enough nuclear material for more than 22,000 nuclear weapons.

Where possible, we aim to convert defense HEU to low enriched uranium for commercial use. Of the 374 metric tons of U.S. HEU removed from weapons use, the United States is down-blending 217 metric tons for peaceful use in commercial or research reactors; 127 metric tons have been down-blended to date. The 217 metric tons includes some 17.4 metric tons that is now being down-blended and set aside for a nuclear fuel reserve to support international efforts to provide states with a viable alternative to pursuing domestic enrichment and reprocessing programs. Perhaps the most successful example of cooperation to reduce nuclear threats is the agreement between the United States and Russia to down-blend more
than 500 metric tons of highly enriched uranium from Russia’s dismantled nuclear weapons for use in U.S. nuclear power plants. Approximately 375 metric tons have been down-blended to date. The United States and Russia have also agreed to effectively dispose of at least 34 metric tons of excess weapon-grade plutonium each, enough for approximately 17,000 nuclear weapons total. This plutonium will be converted to fuel for civil nuclear power plants. Construction of key facilities in the United States is well underway at the Savannah River Site in South Carolina. The United States and Russia are in the process of updating their agreement and cooperation to facilitate Russia’s program.

Mr. Chairman, the United States recognizes its leadership responsibility in this field, but as President Obama said in his statement to the General Assembly, “Those who used to chastise America for acting alone in the world cannot now stand by and wait for America to solve the world’s problems alone.” Creating the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons, which will not come into existence unless it “promotes international stability,” requires the efforts of all.

Nations acquired nuclear weapons in order to promote what they saw as their national security. If they are to give them up, they must be convinced that doing so will not harm their security and that of their friends and allies. They must also have confidence in the strength and durability of the global non-proliferation system.

While we’ve made progress on many fronts, it should be clear that the process leading towards our ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons will require action to strengthen the global non-proliferation regime and to address urgent non-proliferation challenges. President Obama laid out a comprehensive agenda for non-proliferation in Prague last April, calling for enhanced IAEA safeguards, cooperation to defeat proliferation networks, and improved security for vulnerable nuclear material. The United States does not view progress on disarmament and non-proliferation as an either-or proposition; these elements are not in competition. Rather, they should be treated as two sides of the same coin. If the non-proliferation system is weak, states having nuclear weapons will not move to eliminate their arsenals. Nor will states not having nuclear weapons remain confident in the decision taken to forgo these weapons.

Of particular concern are the cases of Iran and North Korea. Iran has an opportunity to restore international confidence in the peaceful nature of its nuclear program that we hope the government will seize. We also expect North Korea to live up to its commitment to abandon its nuclear programs and return to the NPT
and IAEA safeguards. Resolving both of these challenges is a critical element of the push to realize a world without nuclear weapons.

Furthermore, as the arsenals of nuclear weapons come down to low levels, the need for effective verification and compliance becomes greater. We will all have to consider how to achieve effective verification in ways that are stabilizing. Similarly, we will all need to work together to ensure that nations comply with their obligations and that, when they do not, they will face what President Obama characterized in Prague as "real and immediate consequences for ... breaking the rules."

Mr. Chairman,

The international community has reached a greater degree of consensus than ever before on the need to move towards a world without nuclear weapons. The United States is playing its part and urges others – nuclear weapon states and non-nuclear weapons states, as well – to join in this essential endeavor.