Remarks by Honorable Laura E. Kennedy
United States Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament
Delegation of the United States of America
to the UNGA First (Disarmament and International Security) Committee
on “Disarmament machinery”
October 18, 2010

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States Delegation takes the floor today to review the outcome of the recent High Level Meeting on “Revitalizing the work of the Conference on Disarmament and taking forward multilateral negotiations.” I would also like to discuss how we believe the international community best can contribute to a decision by the CD when it reconvenes next January to adopt and implement a Program of Work that includes a mandate for the early negotiation of a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty, or FMCT.

We applaud the dedication of Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to the achievement of comprehensive and balanced disarmament goals as well as his initiative in calling a High Level Meeting. This desire to make progress is shared by the international community and most definitely by my government. I am honored to represent a President whose drive and passion has shaped an extraordinary agenda of disarmament and non-proliferation goals. From his first day in office, President Obama underscored his eagerness to engage fully in international fora.

Mr. Chairman, the Conference on Disarmament, once a respected institution, has fallen into dysfunction and ill repute after more than a dozen years of deadlock. Yet, it is vital that governments have an energetic and effective multilateral forum in which to conduct international arms control negotiations and discussions if we are to make serious progress toward a safe, secure world without nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction.

The United States was highly encouraged when the CD in May 2009 approved by consensus a work program including mandates for FMCT negotiations and for substantive discussions on other issues before the Conference. Our delegation in Geneva was, and remains, eager to roll up our sleeves and get to work on the complicated and difficult negotiations for an FMCT. Unfortunately, the will of the majority in Geneva continues to be frustrated by at least one state unwilling to allow the CD to initiate FMCT negotiations.
Mr. Chairman, our Government appreciates that an FMCT would have profound security implications for countries (including the United States) which have unsafeguarded nuclear facilities. Consequently, we expect that an eventual FMCT negotiation, at the CD or elsewhere, will have to explore fully these and other security issues. The United States envisions that every state participating in such negotiations will have ample opportunity to defend its interests and ensure that an FMCT does not harm vital national interests.

Once FMCT negotiations start, whether in the CD or elsewhere, they must proceed by consensus, and each participating state must retain the sovereign right to determine whether to adhere to the resulting treaty. With these principles in place, no country need fear the prospect of FMCT negotiations. Therefore, it strikes us as unwarranted for a single country to abuse the consensus principle and thereby frustrate everyone else's desire to resume serious disarmament efforts. We believe that these negotiations will take years; therefore, we should get started as soon as possible.

Mr. Chairman, in April 2009 in Prague, President Obama laid out his agenda for practical steps to move toward a nuclear weapons free world. Since then, the United States and the international community have made notable progress. In the midst of this progress, however, the continuing stalemate at the CD sticks out like a sore thumb. Consequently, the United States fully supports the Secretary-General's efforts to revive the Conference from its many years of stalemate. We share his view that the CD’s 2009 work program represents a common denominator, and that the Conference should adopt and implement it at its first plenary session next January. We also welcome the thoughtful proposal by the Secretary-General that his Advisory Board on Disarmament Studies make a thorough study of the broader arms control machinery. We would certainly hope that such a study would also look at the U.N. Disarmament Commission, whose output appears similarly inadequate to the great disarmament challenges facing us.

Mr. Chairman, if we are serious about making a world without nuclear weapons a reality, then we must start now by initiating work on a treaty to end the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. It remains the strong preference of the United States to negotiate an FMCT in the CD. However, after well over a decade of inaction in Geneva, patience is running out for many governments, including our own. If efforts to start negotiations in the CD continue to stall, then those governments that wish to negotiate an FMCT will have to consider other options for moving this process forward.
Mr. Chairman, it is long past time for the Conference on Disarmament to get back to work. An FMCT is too important for the international community to allow the CD’s dysfunction and the needless objections of any one state to dictate the pace of progress on disarmament, so the United States will continue to support other international efforts to identify a way forward for consensus-based FMCT negotiations to begin early next year in Geneva.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.