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Thematic Discussion on Nuclear Weapons
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-- Full Statement --

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Earlier this year in Berlin, President Obama reaffirmed his commitment to the goal of a world without nuclear weapons. The United States continues to undertake mutually reinforcing steps in pursuit of that goal, knowing that only a balanced approach to maintaining international security will move us closer to the world our President envisioned in Prague and again in Berlin. This requires both strengthening the global nuclear nonproliferation regime and working toward nuclear disarmament. A practical, step-by-step approach to disarmament has proven to be the most effective means to increase stability, reduce nuclear dangers, and fulfill our obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

We know there are some who have called for alternate, immediate, wholesale approaches to nuclear disarmament. While we share the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world, we know that real and lasting disarmament will take sustained effort and commitment, requiring us to proceed in a deliberate and step-by-step way. We are pursuing concrete measures toward that end, but the hard truth is that the final goal of disarmament will not be realized overnight or in a single negotiation. Calls for immediate and total disarmament distract from more realistic efforts. We understand the sincere motivations behind efforts to address the humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons; indeed, we share the interest of all states in extending the 68-year record of non-use of nuclear weapons. But any call to move nuclear disarmament into international humanitarian law circles can only distract from the practical agenda set forth in the 2010 NPT Action Plan. We do not support proposals to set up new UN mechanisms to address nuclear disarmament. Such mechanisms would fare no better than existing bodies because the same political challenges present in existing disarmament bodies would be replicated in any new multilateral body.
Moreover, it is clear that the pragmatic, sustained approach we have taken has borne fruit. We recognize our responsibilities, along with the Russian Federation, as the countries holding the largest nuclear arsenals. The United States and the Russian Federation continue to successfully implement the New START Treaty, which is the most comprehensive nuclear arms control agreement in 20 years. When Treaty reductions are completed, we will have cut American and Russian deployed nuclear weapons to their lowest levels since the 1950s. On-site inspections, data exchanges, notifications, and consultations provide a very detailed picture of American and Russian strategic forces, and enable each side to confirm compliance with the Treaty’s reduction and elimination provisions. The Treaty’s verification regime is, in some ways, the most intrusive nuclear weapons verification regime yet, and sets an important precedent and foundation for future negotiations.

The June 2013 release of the Nuclear Posture Review Implementation Study and President Obama’s Berlin speech that same month demonstrate the intention of the United States to seek additional strategic nuclear reductions in conjunction with Russia. The President has determined that the security of the United States and its allies can be ensured, and a strong and credible strategic deterrent can be maintained, while safely pursuing up to a one-third reduction in deployed strategic nuclear weapons from the level established in the New START Treaty. We also intend to work with our NATO allies to seek with Russia reductions in non-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe. The United States will continue to seek reductions in all categories of nuclear weapons – strategic and non-strategic, deployed and non-deployed. To further these goals, we have begun a bilateral dialogue with Russia on strategic stability that can lay the groundwork for future negotiations.

Now, as we make deep reductions and pursue additional ones, I would like to underscore that the United States is neither developing new nuclear weapons, nor are we pursuing any new nuclear missions. As emphasized in the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review and during the New START negotiations, the Administration remains firmly committed to maintaining a safe, secure, and effective nuclear stockpile as long as nuclear weapons exist. Stockpile stewardship and management activities are intended only to sustain existing designs, modernize their safety, security and use control features, and modernize facilities. In addition to enhancing the safety of the nuclear weapons stockpile and maintaining the capabilities for pursuing nuclear disarmament goals, investments in more modern facilities also benefit a
range of nuclear nonproliferation, arms control, emergency response, and counter-terrorism activities.

The five NPT nuclear-weapons states continue to engage intensively on a wide range of topics related to all three pillars of the NPT Action Plan: nuclear disarmament, nonproliferation, and peaceful uses. The Russian Federation hosted the latest in a series of P5 Conferences this past April in Geneva to review and plan P5 progress in fulfilling the Action Plan. This followed the 2009 Conference in London, the 2011 Conference in Paris, and the 2012 Conference in Washington. In addition, in September, China hosted the latest in a series of P5 working group meetings aimed at developing a common glossary of nuclear terms. The P5 are focusing on transparency, reporting, confidence building, and verification; working toward entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and commencement of Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT) negotiations; and engaging on International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards and the NPT withdrawal issue.

The United States has also worked vigorously in recent years to advance nuclear-weapon-free zones, the establishment of which has long been recognized as making an important contribution to disarmament. Signature and ratification of Protocols to nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties also provides the basis for extending legally binding negative security assurances to non-nuclear weapon states. The United States recognizes the legitimate interest of non-nuclear weapon states in receiving these assurances, and we believe that extending such assurances can strengthen the nuclear nonproliferation regime. Following up on Secretary Clinton’s pledge at the 2010 Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, we have submitted protocols to two nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties to the United States Senate for advice and consent to ratification. We have also engaged with the other nuclear weapon states and the parties to the Central Asia and Southeast Asia nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties in an effort to reach agreement that will allow us to sign those treaties’ protocols. Those consultations have continued on the margins of this General Assembly. The United States is committed to this process and looks forward to signing these Protocols as soon as possible.

More broadly, the United States has in place a declaratory policy that it will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon
states that are Party to the NPT and in compliance with their nuclear nonproliferation obligations.

In that spirit, we continue our work to implement the 2010 NPT Review Conference Action Plan and strengthen all three pillars of the NPT. In addition to our disarmament activities, we are working with the IAEA and its Member States to strengthen safeguards, continuing our efforts to make adherence to the Additional Protocol universal, and to ensure that the IAEA has the support necessary to fulfill its missions. And we will continue to work with others to resolve noncompliance by Iran, the DPRK, and Syria with their nonproliferation obligations and UN Security Council resolutions. Unresolved noncompliance presents a fundamental challenge to all NPT parties and puts at risk the many security benefits compliant states derive from the NPT.

We believe that the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty would play a central role in leading the world towards a diminished reliance on nuclear weapons, reduced nuclear competition, and eventual nuclear disarmament. The cessation of all nuclear weapons test explosions and all other nuclear explosions would constrain the development and qualitative improvement of nuclear weapons as well as the development of advanced types of nuclear weapons. We are fully committed to pursuing ratification of the CTBT and its entry into force.

In Berlin, the President called upon all nations to begin negotiations on a treaty that ends the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. A verifiable treaty to prohibit the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons has long been on the disarmament agenda and is overdue. An FMCT is an *absolutely essential step* for global nuclear disarmament and the next logical step in halting the increase of nuclear arsenals. Three years ago, the United States initiated consultations among the P5 and other countries to unblock Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT) negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament (CD), and to prepare our own countries for what we expect to be technically challenging negotiations. We remain hopeful that bringing these countries to the table will help move an FMCT forward and end the stalemate holding up negotiations in the CD. The CD includes every major nuclear capable state and operates by consensus, allowing members to ensure their national security concerns are met. It remains the optimal place to negotiate a multilateral FMCT. However, when it comes to what is in the best interest of international
security, the venue for FMCT negotiations is less important than achieving a credible treaty, and for a treaty to be credible, the states most directly affected by FMCT should be involved in its negotiation.

The United States is actively working to reduce its holdings of fissile material stocks that could be used in nuclear weapons. Under the U.S.-Russia Plutonium Management and Disposition Agreement (PMDA), each side will verifiably dispose of no less than 34 metric tons of weapon-grade plutonium – enough in total for 17,000 nuclear weapons. The PMDA entered into force in 2011, and our two countries are working toward an agreement on verification provisions with the IAEA. Once disposed of, this plutonium will be in a form that cannot be used for nuclear weapons.

In addition, we have disposed of excess, weapons-origin fissile material by down-blending approximately 140 Metric Tons of HEU -- enough material for more than 5,600 nuclear weapons. As a transparency measure, the United States cooperated with the IAEA to allow international monitoring of the downblending of 50 Metric Tons of this material.

This year also marks a significant nonproliferation accomplishment: the 1993 United States-Russian Federation Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) Purchase Agreement will reach a major milestone with the final delivery of low enriched uranium (LEU) derived from downblending 500 metric tons of Russian weapons origin HEU. The LEU that results from this downblending process is delivered to the United States, fabricated into nuclear fuel, and used by nearly all U.S. nuclear power plants to generate approximately half of the nuclear energy in the United States. We have eliminated enough HEU for about 20,000 nuclear weapons under this unique government-industry partnership.

We are also enhancing support for the NPT’s third and vital pillar, the peaceful use of nuclear energy, not only to strengthen the regime, but to contribute to economic development. In addition to our long-standing support to the IAEA’s Technical Cooperation Fund, we pledged $50 million to the IAEA’s Peaceful Uses Initiative (PUI) between 2010 and 2015, and we have already provided over $30 million to date. Funded PUI projects are benefitting over 120 countries. Of this, nearly half has been designated towards projects that the Director General has highlighted as key priorities, such as water resource management (including projects being implemented at the Agency’s Environmental Labs in Monaco); food security; and human
health, particularly work in cancer therapies. We welcome the partnership of the 16 other countries that have joined by contributing to this important IAEA initiative.

Mr. Chairman, we know that much remains on our agenda, and that the path to a world without nuclear weapons remains a long one. Yet we should not forget that we have made real progress, and we know what we need to do next to move further down that path. The United States is committed to fulfilling our obligations and working with the international community to take the next steps. Of course, all Member States have a role to play in disarmament, and we look forward to working with you to achieve that ultimate goal.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.