Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States supports the UN's existing multilateral disarmament machinery because it remains in our interests to do so. Starting in 1945, at the founding of the UN, the U.S. has welcomed engagement with nations from around the world on the important international security matters discussed here in the First Committee. We have also negotiated and deliberated in good faith in the Conference on Disarmament (CD), the UN Disarmament Commission (UNDC), and the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) for a Fourth Special Session of the General Assembly Devoted to Disarmament (SSOD IV), actively participated in the Secretary-General’s Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters, and have sent our young diplomats into the Disarmament Fellowship program for specialized training in this field.

The existing disarmament machinery as established and endorsed by the 1978 First Special Session on Disarmament is based on two essential elements for any hope of tangible progress on disarmament: a clear recognition of the prevailing international security environment and a culture of consensus building and decision making. Sovereign nations - if they wish to remain sovereign for long - have always based their national security decisions on a realistic appraisal of present or future geopolitical threats to themselves and their allies. This is not a new idea. What is new is that, in recent years, some have decided that majority rule on multilateral disarmament issues should override the sovereign equality of states. That the culture of consensus which has ungirded all of our work in this field for the last 70 years is passé, a relic of a bygone era.

Mr. Chairman, for the sake of our own security and indeed global order, we disagree with this approach. The UN’s disarmament machinery, the UN itself, is the product of very realistic and pragmatic men and woman from around the world who endured the horrors of World War II and sought ways to prevent such a conflict from every happening again. The concept of collective security on which the UN is founded requires that sovereign governments avoid, to the maximum extent possible, situations where a state or a group of states seek to impose their will on others. Consensus building and making is the coin of the realm of the United Nations and it always has been. Certainly, the rules of procedure of the General Assembly and First Committee allow for voting, but on matters affecting national and international security, such a practice should always be a last resort, not the first.

This year, the United States played its part in modest successes in two bodies of the machinery. In April, the UNDC agreed by consensus to recommendations on practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons. The last time the Commission agreed to consensus recommendations on any topic was in 1999. In June, the SSOD IV OEWG agreed, also by consensus, to the objectives and agenda for an SSOD IV, an effort that also goes back
many years. While the United States remains deeply skeptical of the value added of an SSOD IV even now, we decided to support this consensus-based effort as a signal of our commitment to the UN’s consensus-based multilateral disarmament institutions.

Regarding the CD, the United States remains highly concerned that this year, one CD Member State, during its tenure as President of the Conference, refused to convene any plenary meetings. This decision was taken without consulting CD participating States and is not consistent with the CD Rules of Procedure, or the responsibilities of the office of the President of the CD. This unwarranted action deprived the international community of a forum to address security challenges such as North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic missile programs, and we find it unacceptable.

Finally, on First Committee thematic discussion, we are dismayed about how the composition of the October 11 high-level panel was handled this year. Mr. Chairman, we know that you did your best to find a consensus way forward on this issue, as did this delegation and others, but our appeals for compromise were rejected by certain other delegations. This is regrettable, and we do not consider this to be a precedent for future procedural questions before the Committee, on which consensus and basic fairness should be our objective.

Thank you.