Mr. President,

It gives me great pleasure to address this gathering on behalf of the United States. Mr. President, the enormous energy, diplomatic skill, and, yes, patience, that you have demonstrated in leading us to this point is extraordinary. I pledge the United States will continue to work closely with you and our colleagues around the room to achieve consensus on an effective Arms Trade Treaty in order, as Secretary Clinton clearly stated, “to ensure that all countries can be held to standards that will actually improve the global situation by denying arms to those who would abuse them.”

We seek a treaty that establishes high international standards for controlling the transfer of arms on par with current best practices. A key benefit of such standards will be to reduce illicit arms trafficking. The international community as a whole suffers from illicit trafficking, which arms repressive regimes, criminal syndicates, insurgent groups, and terrorist organizations, and weakens legitimate governments and the rule of law. So the international community must create additional barriers to the illicit and irresponsible international transfer of arms to those who have little regard for the most fundamental standards of decency and civilization.

In this regard, the U.S. must underscore its objection and formally express our strong condemnation of the selection of Iran to the ceremonial role of one of fourteen vice presidents of this conference. Iran’s longstanding record of weapons proliferation, illicit nuclear activities, and gross human rights abuses properly disqualify it from serving in any such position in the United Nations. At a time when Iran is violating its UN Security Council obligations, including by helping to rearm Hezbollah in Lebanon and providing weapons to the Assad regime to use to slaughter his own people, this selection makes a mockery of this conference’s underlying purposes and undermines the credibility of the UN. Furthermore, we note that according to media reports, Iran has misrepresented its ceremonial role at the Conference by implying it has secured its election on the basis of their record on international peace and security. The United States rejects the legitimacy of Iran’s claimed capacity to play any credible role in the Conference.
As we work toward making illicit trade in conventional arms more difficult, we also work toward strengthening the legal basis for legitimate arms trade. Lawfully conducted international transfers of arms managed according to transparent national control practices are vital to maintaining good governance, protecting citizens, and upholding international security consistent with the UN Charter. The Arms Trade Treaty should not in any way handicap the legitimate right of self-defense. Acting together, we can strengthen international peace and security and the rule of law by requiring universal establishment of responsible national standards for the arms trade.

Of course, states are already obligated under international law to abide by UN Security Council arms embargos; the Arms Trade Treaty should reinforce this fundamental obligation. In addition, exporting governments should be obliged to weigh carefully whether a potential recipient of conventional arms is going to use or divert supplied arms for criminal or other unacceptable or inhumane purposes. That is why the United States supports establishing additional criteria that each government must consider carefully before authorizing the export of conventional arms, to ensure that international transfers even to legitimate end users are not made capriciously, without deliberation, or contrary to longstanding international principles. In order for the ATT to be effective, it is important that it covers the widest range of conventional weapons as is practical, from small arms to aircraft carriers.

Today, just over one-quarter of UN members have developed and implemented legal controls regarding their international arms trade. Our common goal is to have a treaty at the end of this month that will require states parties to regulate their international arms trade according to high standards, in accordance with their own constitutional and legal structures.

Moreover, we must acknowledge and respect that this negotiation is not an attempt to intrude, either in principle or process, into states’ internal activities, laws, or practices concerning the domestic possession, use, or movement of arms. Rather, this treaty will regulate only the international trade in arms. Any attempt to include provisions in the treaty that would interfere with each state’s sovereign control over the domestic possession, use, or movement of arms is clearly outside the scope of our mandate.

I think we all recognize the enormous diplomatic task the Conference has set for itself: concluding an effective ATT in four short weeks of negotiation by consensus with potentially all 193 member states of the United Nations. So we have a lot of work in front of us, and the United States looks forward to working with all of you to negotiate a treaty that raises international standards and curbs illicit arms transfers while preserving national prerogatives with regard to the legitimate arms trade.

Thank you, Mr. President.