Statement by United States Ambassador
Laura Kennedy
To the Conference on Disarmament
March 5, 2013

Madam President, thank you for the opportunity to address nuclear disarmament, which has long been a core issue on the CD’s agenda and is high on my own President’s priorities.

It has been nearly four years since President Obama delivered a now-famous speech in Prague stating the United States’ commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons. This was no rhetorical flourish. It was a road map for the future of nuclear arms control -- a step by step, measured strategy that takes into account the security landscape of the 21st century.

The United States has taken the first steps with our Russian partners. The New START Treaty is the most comprehensive arms control agreement in almost 20 years. When the Treaty is fully implemented, we will be at the lowest levels of deployed strategic nuclear warheads since the 1950s. Overall reductions reveal an 85 percent decrease in the U.S. arsenal since its height during the Cold War. The implementation of the Treaty is going very well, and its robust verification system is providing the predictability and mutual confidence that will be essential to future nuclear reduction plans. When President Obama signed New START in Prague in 2010, he stressed his intention to pursue further reductions in strategic, non-strategic, deployed and non-deployed nuclear weapons. We and the Russian Federation are engaged in a bilateral dialogue to promote strategic stability and increase transparency on a reciprocal basis. Since the beginning of President Obama’s second Administration, there have been top-level communications between our governments, including between Presidents and our new Secretary of State and his Russian counterpart. We look forward to a summit in Russia this year.

We are also breaking new ground through the P-5 process. This high-priority, regularized dialogue among the five Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty nuclear weapon states regarding issues related to nuclear disarmament, nonproliferation, and the associated verification challenges contributes to our collective progress on the 2010 NPT Action Plan. The United States hosted the
Washington P5 Conference this past June – the third in a series of such conferences. We look forward to continuing our engagement at the next P5 Conference, to be hosted by the Russian Federation in Geneva this April. These conferences are contributing to political dialogue and new forms of cooperation on nuclear weapons issues to an unprecedented extent. In addition to providing a senior level policy forum, this process has spawned a series of expert exchanges during the “intersessional period.” China is leading a P5 working group on nuclear definitions and terminology. The P5 are discussing our national approaches to NPT reporting, and we are also continuing exchanges on verification and transparency issues.

The United States has also demonstrated leadership through unilateral transparency measures. Examples include the U.S. release in 2010 of the U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile figures and articulation in the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review of the reduced role of nuclear weapons in the U.S. national strategy. On “modernization,” let me reiterate in the clearest terms; the NPR made it clear that that the United States will not develop new nuclear warheads and it will not support new military missions for nuclear weapons.

The United States is now conducting the follow-on analysis called for in the 2010 U.S. Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) to set goals for future nuclear reductions in line with strategic requirements. As part of the larger global architecture designed to reduce the dangers of nuclear weapons and nuclear terrorism, the United States has also taken a leadership role in international efforts to secure vulnerable nuclear materials. As a result of President Obama’s initiative to secure all vulnerable nuclear materials around the world, two Nuclear Security Summits have already been held, with a third to take place in The Hague in March 2014.

With the second NPT PrepCom in Geneva fast approaching, I would like to strongly reaffirm the United States commitment to the shared goal of nuclear disarmament. We continue to implement the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference Action Plan across all three pillars of the NPT – disarmament, nonproliferation, and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. The basic bargain[s] of the NPT, in which nuclear weapon states pursue disarmament, non-nuclear weapon states abstain from the pursuit of nuclear weapons, and all countries are able to access the benefits of peaceful nuclear energy, set[s] an enduring standard that is as relevant today as it was at the Treaty’s inception. There are pressing challenges. We continue to have grave concerns about those who have violated their NPT obligations and undermined
confidence in the nonproliferation regime. These transgressions stand directly in the way of our shared goals for a world free of nuclear weapons.

This Conference has had a central role to play in multilateral nuclear disarmament. Entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) remains a top priority for the United States. As we move forward with our ratification process, we encourage all other nations to do the same. We remain committed to launch negotiations on a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty, the next logical, multilateral step toward nuclear disarmament which will provide an important foundation for future nuclear reductions. In many ways the FMCT is the test case for multilateral nuclear disarmament and the CD as a negotiating forum. Since we will be discussing this topic at the next plenary, I will have further to say on this key topic on that occasion.

We understand that the CD’s failures have led states to look elsewhere. However, we do not support non-consensus based efforts to develop nuclear disarmament proposals through the Open-Ended Working Group and do not see how this mechanism fits into the existing consensus framework of the NPT Action Plan. After careful consideration, the United States has also decided not to attend the Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons taking place today in Norway, our good partner and ally. Our decision was not made lightly. It was made in consultation with our P5 partners, who have also decided not to attend. I will, of course, speak to our own thinking and let other nuclear weapons states speak for themselves.

The United States is acutely aware of the consequences of nuclear weapon use and will continue to give the highest priority to avoiding any such use by enhancing nuclear security worldwide while we steadily reduce nuclear arsenals, including by seeking to lock down fissile material worldwide. As President Obama stated at the Seoul NSS, “nuclear terrorism is one of the most urgent and serious threats to global security.” As the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review made clear, it is in our interest as well as that of all nations, that the now nearly 68-year record of non-use of nuclear weapons be extended forever. We must also address the challenges posed by non-compliance with the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and other threats to international security. We know well that any use of nuclear weapons, whether by a state or by nuclear terrorists, “would fundamentally change our lives in ways that we cannot imagine” as President Obama stated in Seoul last April.
We are focusing our efforts and energy on practical steps we and others are taking to reduce nuclear weapon arsenals while strengthening nuclear security and the nonproliferation regime. The practical, step-by-step approach to disarmament has proven to be the most effective means to increase stability, reduce nuclear weapon dangers and fulfill our commitments under the NPT. Reducing nuclear weapon arsenals entails much serious, painstaking work on destruction, verification and other aspects. Luckily, the excellent work that has been done and is being done by the Bilateral Consultative Commission established under the New START Treaty is pointing the way forward with solid achievement.

I know that many in this chamber, whether they be member states, observers or our civil society partners, will have divergent opinions. Let me underline our commitment to the vision of a world without nuclear weapons even if we have a different roadmap of moving toward that goal. We value this partnership with committed states and our civil society friends and as always look forward to a robust sharing of information of our various endeavors here and in other venues.

Thank you.