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Regional Issues
Second Session of the Preparatory Committee
2015 Review Conference of the States Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
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Mr. Chairman,

The United States continues to support universal adherence to the Treaty, and we seek to further strengthen and uphold the Treaty. Developments in the Middle East continue to present challenges to the NPT and to our collective security.

The United States remains committed to convening a conference on a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction. We regret that it proved impossible to meet last year as envisioned in the 2010 NPT Review Conference Final Document. This was not a breach of the Action Plan as some suggest — but it was a major disappointment. Still, we are not discouraged. We missed an important deadline — but we have not yet missed the opportunity to transform the security environment of the region.

In fact, unprecedented diplomatic efforts continue to be directed at making the conference a reality. But the responsibility to hold the conference does not fall solely to the Conveners and Facilitator. We remain prepared to assist in any way requested, but leadership must also come from the states of the region. They will be responsible for the big idea — creating the political and security conditions that would make a WMD free zone an achievable concept. And they need to start now by showing creative thinking on a scale that is smaller, but big enough to get us to the first step, to Helsinki.

Direct engagement of the concerned parties is the pathway to a successful and meaningful conference. Participation in Helsinki of all regional states, as the Action Plan foresees, will only be possible if each State believes its key concerns can be addressed within the agenda of the Conference. And that agenda simply cannot be dictated from outside the region — it must be consensual among the States who must live with the agenda. To agree to dialogue, with the aim of reaching consensus on such an agenda, is not a concession. To impose pre-conditions on a dialogue serves only to delay its initiation, without changing its substance.

The United States fully appreciates, and I personally sympathize with, the disappointment and frustration that the Conference was not held in 2012. These reactions are justified. However, we all share a responsibility to move beyond frustration, and back toward direct, meaningful engagement among the regional parties. We should not expect meaningful steps toward bringing all regional parties together to occur in a room this large.

Mr. Chairman,

This brings us to the important role of the Facilitator. The United States has full confidence in Ambassador Laajava and welcomes his report. Laajava is the most fair-minded, creative and patient diplomat I know. His team has been untiring in an effort to take the first step on an initiative that has never been attempted on the planet, creation of a WMD-free zone in a region where both states and non-state actors daily use weapons, one against another. We agreed with his conclusion: before we can take a step to Helsinki, we need first to take one half-step — to direct multilateral consultations. We urge all states of the region to recognize the opportunity presented by these preparatory consultations and that they can be arranged soon. I continue to believe that a conference could be held at an early date, within months, if there existed the
political will of the relevant parties to reach consensus on an agenda and other arrangements for the conference.

Mr. Chairman,

Certain proponents of the conference speak as if the only issue to be discussed is Israel. However, an honest discussion must also take into account the large quantities of chemical weapons held by Syria, and the fundamental challenge posed by Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon.

The United States is gravely concerned about the Iranian nuclear program. Iran is not just in violation of its international nuclear obligations, but is contemptuous of those obligations, and of the instruments that create those obligations: the United Nations Security Council, the IAEA Board of Governors, and the Non-Proliferation Treaty itself.

Since many undeclared elements of its nuclear program became public in 2002, Iran has yet to cooperate fully with the IAEA or negotiate seriously with the P5+1 to address the international community’s legitimate concerns. As detailed in numerous reports by the IAEA Director General, the IAEA has credible information that raises serious concerns regarding possible military dimensions to Iran’s nuclear program, including activities by Iran related to the development of a nuclear payload for delivery by a ballistic missile. The IAEA’s findings, compounded by Iran’s longstanding noncompliance with its international nuclear obligations, call into question Iran’s stated claims that its nuclear program is exclusively peaceful. We are disappointed that Iran has missed numerous opportunities to address the international community’s concerns.

Mr. Chairman, the United States does not dispute the right of states that comply with their nonproliferation obligations to pursue nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Regrettably, Iran has persistently failed to respect multiple Security Council resolutions that Iran must cooperate with the IAEA and suspend its proliferation-sensitive nuclear activities, including uranium enrichment. As President Obama has stated, Iran can enjoy peaceful nuclear power while still meeting its international obligations and providing clear assurances to the international community that it is not pursuing a nuclear weapon.

With regard to Syria, it has been nearly two years since IAEA Director General Amano reported that the facility destroyed in 2007 at Dair Alzour was “very likely” a nuclear reactor that should have been declared to the Agency pursuant to Syria’s safeguards agreement. Consequently, in June 2011 the IAEA Board of Governors found Syria in noncompliance with its safeguards agreement and, in accordance with the IAEA Statute, referred the matter to the UN Security Council. To date, Syria has not taken any concrete steps to address the outstanding serious questions about its clandestine nuclear activities. The Asad regime’s brutal campaign of violence against the Syrian people and the resulting unrest cannot be an excuse for not cooperating with the IAEA. Syria remains obligated to remedy its noncompliance immediately and demonstrate a constructive approach in its relations with the IAEA and the international community.
Noncompliance should be a matter of serious concern to NPT Parties. As agreed in the 2010 Action Plan, it is vitally important that all NPT Parties support the resolution of all cases of noncompliance with IAEA safeguards and other nonproliferation requirements. The Treaty and the regime can only be as strong as the Parties’ will to uphold the Treaty’s integrity.

Mr. Chairman,

North Korea also presents serious challenges to the NPT and international peace and security. North Korea’s provocations, including its recent nuclear and missile tests, its belligerent rhetoric, and other destabilizing actions have received resounding and overwhelming international condemnation. The United States has made it clear that we will not accept North Korea as a nuclear-armed state. North Korea must comply with its international obligations and commitments or face further isolation.

The United States and our allies and Six-Party partners remain committed to the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula in a peaceful manner. The United States remains open to authentic and credible negotiations to implement the September 2005 Joint Statement of the Six-Party Talks, which require North Korea to abandon all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs, and to return to the NPT and IAEA safeguards.

Permit me, Mr. Chairman, to also say a few words about the current situation in South Asia. The United States remains deeply concerned by the dangers posed by the continuing buildup of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems in South Asia. Consistent with our shared vision of a world without nuclear weapons, the United States has repeatedly called on India and Pakistan to restrain their nuclear and missile programs; end the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons; and support the commencement of negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament of a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty. In that regard, it is with concern and deep disappointment that we note Pakistan’s reluctance to support the start of such negotiations.

We would welcome meaningful trust- and confidence-building between these nuclear-armed states; we must find ways to reduce regional tensions and diminish the risk that nuclear weapons could be used, either intentionally or accidentally, in a crisis.

We furthermore continue to encourage both India and Pakistan to play a positive role in the global nonproliferation community and take steps to prevent proliferation, including bringing their strategic trade controls in line with the guidelines of the multilateral supplier regimes, and we support, in a phased manner, India’s goal of joining the four multilateral export control regimes. Finally, let me stress that we remain cognizant of our nonproliferation commitments and objectives when considering how to conduct our bilateral relations with any country. Our activities with both India and Pakistan continue to be consistent with our NPT obligations and with our commitment as members of the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The United States remains committed to working with all countries in a concerted effort to resolve these important regional challenges, in order to uphold the integrity and credibility of the global nuclear nonproliferation regime.