Mr. Chairman,

The United States remains committed to the implementation of all provisions of the NPT, including Article VI, and to the steadfast pursuit of the Treaty’s objectives. We would do well to recall the benefits NPT Parties derive from the Treaty. At the height of the Cold War, there were over 60,000 nuclear weapons stockpiled worldwide. Before the treaty was signed, President Kennedy had warned that as many as twenty-five countries might possess nuclear weapons by the end of the 1970s. In large part because of the NPT, however, this has not happened. Proliferation has been far slower than those predictions, and indeed many states have eliminated their nuclear weapon programs or decided not to pursue nuclear weapons in the first place. All but one of the NPT nuclear-weapon states have also taken extraordinary steps to reduce their total stockpiles.

For its part, the United States has lived up to its obligation under the Treaty to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures related to ending the nuclear arms race and to nuclear disarmament. Indeed, we have done much more, actually reduced our total stockpile of active and inactive nuclear warheads by over 85% from its Cold War peak, from 31,255 nuclear weapons in 1967 to 4,018 as of 2016. Many categories of nuclear weapons have been removed from our stockpile altogether. The United States and Russia continue to implement the New START Treaty as the February 2018 deadline for its central limits approaches. The United States and Russia are successfully implementing the New START verification regime and are expected to meet the central limits of the Treaty when they take effect in February 2018, capping U.S. and Russian forces at their lowest level since the 1950s.

The United States has also made significant reductions in its military stocks of fissile material. Out of the 95.4 metric tons of plutonium in the U.S. plutonium stockpile most recently reported in 2009, the United States has declared 61.5 metric tons excess to U.S. defense needs. Out of 686 metric tons in the U.S. stockpile of highly enriched uranium most recently reported in 2004, the United States has removed 374 metric tons from weapons programs. More than 153 metric tons removed from the stockpile has been downblended for use as civil reactor fuel. Additionally, under the 1993 U.S.-Russia Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) Purchase Agreement, 500 metric tons, the equivalent of 20,000 nuclear warheads,
of Russian weapons-origin HEU was downblended to LEU and used in U.S. nuclear power plants for over twenty years.

These massive reductions in our nuclear arsenals and fissile stockpiles for use in nuclear weapons – and analogous reductions by all other NPT nuclear weapon states but China, which unfortunately is still increasing the size of its strategic arsenal – were possible because the end of the Cold War brought about a more stable and secure international security environment. In that environment, states could feel confident that significant reductions in their nuclear arsenals would increase, not decrease, their security. Part of this confidence came from the fact that the NPT and the broader nuclear nonproliferation regime had put in place conditions and understandings which have prevented the runaway proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Chairman,

Unfortunately, despite this extraordinary progress in reducing nuclear risks since the end of the Cold War, the international security environment has deteriorated substantively in recent years. Several countries are expanding their nuclear arsenals or developing new nuclear weapon capabilities. Worse, some nuclear-armed states have taken provocative actions that threaten the security of their neighbors. There have been few instances of noncompliance with nonproliferation and arms control obligations, but those that have occurred have been significant – and some of them remain unresolved. These include the violation of a seminal agreement that had eliminated an entire class of nuclear delivery systems and North Korea’s violation of (and declared withdrawal from) the NPT in order to develop nuclear weaponry. In another instance, Iran violated its nuclear safeguards and NPT Article II obligations, as well as multiple legally-binding UN Security Council obligations, only thereafter to seek international legitimation of its fissile material production while engaging in provocative acts such as long-range missile development and support for international terrorism.

All such actions undermine international stability, call into question the international community’s ability to rely upon negotiated agreements as tools for protecting and advancing peace and security, and create impediments to the lessening of tension and strengthening of trust that the NPT recognizes as being essential to further steps toward nuclear disarmament.
Where the arms race once seemed to have been definitively put to rest, moreover, two NPT nuclear weapon states are now expanding their nuclear arsenals and developing new kinds of capabilities, some of them potentially quite destabilizing. Both have also contributed to rising regional tensions – most of all with Russia’s aggression in eastern Ukraine, occupation and attempted annexation of Crimea, and disregarding the Budapest Memorandum. Such actions threaten international peace and strategic stability and make the conditions necessary for further disarmament far more difficult to achieve.

With an increasingly dangerous nuclear and ballistic missile capability, the DPRK presents an ever growing threat to international peace and to the national security of the United States and our allies. North Korea has openly stated that its objective is to be able to reach U.S. and allied cities with nuclear weapons. The DPRK presents a threat that we simply cannot ignore, and it is the responsibility of every nation gathered here today to implement in word and spirit the measures included in U.N. Security Council Resolutions to compel the Kim Jong-Un regime to change course before its provocations bring about catastrophe.

Over 30 years of diplomatic efforts have failed to prevent the development of the DPRK’s proscribed weapons of mass destruction programs. In the face of this ever-escalating threat, it is clear that a different approach is required. NPT Parties can and must do more to ensure that their trade and engagement with DPRK entities are not inadvertently funding its WMD program – as virtually all of the Pyongyang regime’s external sources of revenue do. Determining how to mitigate the nuclear threat from North Korea should be the central issue in our discussions during this PrepCom.

In this unstable international security environment, the Trump Administration is undertaking a review of U.S. policies that address broad questions of the interplay between U.S. strategic policy and arms control and disarmament matters. While we cannot predict the outcome of that review, we expect it will address the full range of challenges that we face, including cases of noncompliance, the expanding nuclear arsenals in some countries, and the current, sadly worsening, security environment. Additionally, we are conducting a new Nuclear Posture Review, which is expected to contribute to our approach in the present NPT review cycle. While our policy is under review, one thing remains clear – nuclear deterrence continues to play an integral role in preserving peace and maintaining stability.

Some states have abandoned the consensus-based approach that has served us so well over the past 50 years, and are supporting negotiation of a nuclear weapons
ban treaty. A treaty that attempts to ban these weapons without addressing the security concerns that continue to make nuclear deterrence necessary will not result in the elimination of a single nuclear weapon and will not enhance any country’s security. Instead, such a treaty may well make the world a more dangerous and unstable place – not least by undermining the U.S. alliance relationships that have done so much, for so long, to preserve the peace against the specter of regional aggression in Europe and in East Asia. It is also imperative that the “ban treaty” initiative not become a distraction in the NPT review process, where it risks creating an unbridgeable divide among NPT Parties, further polarizing the political environment on nuclear disarmament, distracting states from the critical work the international community has yet to do in making the NPT work, and limiting future prospects for achieving consensus on effective measures related to ending the nuclear arms race and to nuclear disarmament.

Instead of pursuing such unhelpful, counterproductive, and faddish distractions, I urge everyone here to step back from long-entrenched divisions and focus instead on our common interests in sustaining a strong NPT, and on what practical steps we can take to advance those interests and vindicate our shared aspirations for a safe, secure, and peaceful future for all of our citizens.

Mr. Chairman,

As the United States reviews its policies, we look forward to engaging with all NPT member states to address the security challenges we currently face and to chart a path to a more peaceful and secure world. In order to achieve success, we need to reembrace a culture of consensus-building and consensus decision-making. This has made progress possible in the past and will allow us to move forward in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.