

U.S. Statement to the United Nations Disarmament Commission
April 15, 2009

Thank you, Mr. Chairman,

It is a great pleasure to see you leading our meeting. The United States delegation has been especially impressed by the time and energy you have devoted to efforts to reach agreement on an agenda and program of work for this session of the UNDC. I can assure you of the U.S. delegation's full support during the remaining time of our meeting.

Mr. Chairman,

This Commission meets at a particularly auspicious moment, just a short time after President Obama's groundbreaking speech in Prague on nonproliferation and disarmament. His commitment that the United States will "seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons" was widely applauded around the world.

In his speech President Obama described the steps the United States would take on the road to that goal. They include:

- Reducing the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. national security strategy.
- Negotiating a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with Russia this year.
- Pursuing – "immediately and aggressively," as the President put it – ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. As President Obama said, "it is time for the testing of nuclear weapons to finally be banned."
- Negotiating a new treaty that verifiably ends the production of fissile materials intended for use in state nuclear weapons – what we in this room know as a fissile material cutoff treaty or FMCT,
- Strengthening the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. In this regard President Obama referred to the "basic bargain" contained in the Treaty: "Countries with nuclear weapons will move toward disarmament, countries without nuclear weapons will not acquire them, and all countries can access peaceful nuclear energy." He then described several principles to accomplish the

task of strengthening the NPT: more resources and authority to strengthen international inspections, "real and immediate consequences" for states that violate the rules, and building a new framework for civil nuclear cooperation.

President Obama also stressed the need to ensure that terrorists never acquire a nuclear weapon and outlined steps the United States would take in conjunction with other states to "secure all vulnerable nuclear material around the world within four years."

Mr. Chairman,

It is in the light of President Obama's speech that our delegation sees the agenda of this Commission. During our consideration of the first, nuclear item on the agenda, "Recommendations for achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation of nuclear weapons," the U.S. delegation intends to focus on how the nations represented here can begin to implement President Obama's vision of a world without nuclear weapons. We will focus on the conditions necessary for such a world to come into being.

For example, how can we assure the countries that possess nuclear weapons, as well as their allies, that their security will not be impaired as they reduce the numbers of nuclear weapons and their role in national strategies?

A second important issue is the verification requirements that will be necessary to ensure that no one is violating a total ban on nuclear weapons. Surely verification is even more essential when we talk about very low levels of nuclear weapons or even none at all. In such circumstances, any violation of the nonproliferation and disarmament regime would be very serious. This body is not set up to consider the technical details of verification, but it might consider such important questions as the level of assurance necessary and the respective advantages of national and international, means of verification.

Third, we may wish to consider compliance mechanisms. Clearly, states will want to be sure that any violations will be met with the real and immediate consequences to which President Obama referred. As he also said, "we need a structure in place that ensures when any nation [breaks the rules], they will face consequences." Considering what such a structure might look like is another task for us, but without strong assurance that there will be consequences for noncompliance, verification measures have little value.

These are difficult questions, and we doubt that the Commission will arrive at definitive answers, even in three years. But we might make a start, a real contribution to the discussion of this issue.

Moving to the second item on our agenda, “Elements for the declaration of the 2010’s as the fourth disarmament decade,” the U.S. delegation believes such a declaration should contain a small number of key principles of disarmament and nonproliferation. It should consider issues related to nuclear weapons, to other weapons of mass destruction, and to conventional weapons. To be meaningful, it must take account of the need to establish a new security paradigm to replace nuclear deterrence as an essential step in creating the conditions for nuclear zero. An essential aspect of this would be a strengthened nonproliferation regime that would serve to ensure that, as states eliminate their nuclear stockpiles, new nuclear weapon states do not arise. Since the Commission must adopt a report to the General Assembly by consensus and do so quickly, delegations should seek areas of common understanding and not try to insert concepts that will not enjoy consensus.

Finally, Mr. Chairman,

Our delegation notes that consensus on considering a conventional item this year was not possible. We strongly regret this, not only because we consider that previous decisions of the General Assembly clearly provide for a nuclear and a conventional item, but also because issues of conventional disarmament – including confidence-building measures, transparency, and verification – are for many L/N members – perhaps the majority of them – of the greatest immediate interest. When the Commission resumes consideration of conventional disarmament in 2010, the United States will have suggestions to make, drawing on its own experience in this field. We hope the discussion of this item will lead to agreement on concrete measures that member states can draw upon.

Mr. Chairman,

The United States delegation wishes you and the bureau all success in your conduct of the 2009 session of the UNDC.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.