Madam President, thank you for the opportunity to address this plenary on the Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty – FMCT. The negotiation of an FMCT has been an issue at the core of this Conference’s agenda for many years. It is a central tenet of President Obama’s Prague vision of a world without nuclear weapons -- part of the step by step mutually reinforcing process to get there. Many times the international community has underlined the centrality of FMCT to nuclear disarmament. The international community has long been ready to negotiate FMCT. For no other nuclear disarmament measure has the technical and conceptual ground work been better prepared than it has for FMCT. The 2010 NPT Review Conference Action Plan reaffirms FMCT’s priority and the primacy of achieving it as a logical and essential next step on the path towards global nuclear disarmament. We much prefer that FMCT be dealt with here in the CD, a well-established venue for negotiations that includes every major nuclear-capable state and operates by consensus.

But while there are no technical or conceptual obstacles to the commencement of FMCT negotiations, there are political ones. As you are well aware, these are self-inflicted. A Program of Work including FMCT negotiations, CD/1864, was approved by this Conference in the spring of 2009, and would have set things in motion. Since then, however, negotiations on FMCT in the CD have been blocked and the will of the international community has been repeatedly thwarted. Efforts by several CD members to craft sensible, compromise language have all failed, including two promising Program of Work proposals offered by the distinguished representatives of Egypt and Hungary, respectively, and an earlier effort by Brazil, when the equally distinguished Brazilian Ambassador presided over the CD. The deadlock in the CD over FMCT appears as intractable today as it ever has, though it need not be.

Years of frustration and inactivity led to a predictable result, with the 2012 UNGA First Committee taking action. While not enthusiastic about increasing UNGA involvement in CD-related issues, the United States assessed that the Canadian-sponsored FMCT resolution (67/53) establishing a Group of Government Experts (GGE) was balanced, consensus-based, and could lead to future FMCT negotiations in the CD. This is why in the end we decided to support the Canadian resolution and why we will encourage others to support its work. It’s not a substitute for the CD; it’s an impetus for the CD to regain lost credibility by returning to the role carved out for it as a forum for multilateral disarmament negotiations. We intend to actively participate in the GGE, if invited, and we will encourage other countries that would be directly affected by an FMCT to do the same. As the Canadian Ambassador noted, the UN Secretary General invited views on FMCT in this regard. The U.S. will provide such views by May 15, as requested, and hopes all other states will do so as well.

Madam President, my delegation has already outlined our substantive views on a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty in past plenaries, and in other meetings held over the past two years on the “margins” of the Conference on Disarmament. The U.S. shares the international goal of a non-discriminatory treaty that halts the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, and that is internationally verifiable. An FMCT would be an important, international achievement, both for nonproliferation and disarmament. It would effectively cap the fissile materials available for use in nuclear weapons. Put alongside the
Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), measures that constrain the technological sophistication of a country’s nuclear arsenal, and its size, would be in place. An FMCT would also fold additional enrichment and reprocessing facilities into the international monitoring regime of IAEA safeguards. It would help consolidate the advancements in arms control since the end of the Cold War, and provide the basis for further, deeper reductions in nuclear arsenals globally.

Consistent with the Shannon mandate, the ultimate scope of the Treaty will be an issue for negotiations. The U.S. position on FMCT scope is well known. It is that FMCT obligations, including verification obligations, should cover new production of fissile material. Existing stockpiles should be dealt with separately, through other agreements and voluntary measures. We have already undertaken such agreements with Russia, and have taken unilateral steps in addition. In 1994, the United States removed 174 metric tons of highly enriched uranium from its weapons program. In 2005, the United States announced that an additional 200 metric tons would be removed, which would be enough for more than 11,000 nuclear weapons. In an arrangement with Russia, 472 metric tons of Russian highly enriched uranium has now been down-blended for use as commercial reactor fuel and that number is expected to reach the 500 MT target this year. In addition, more than 60 metric tons of plutonium was removed from U.S. defense stocks, of which 34 metric tons was included in the U.S.-Russia Plutonium Management and Disposition Agreement (PMDA). That agreement commits each country to dispose of at least 34 metric tons of excess weapon-grade plutonium, enough in total for approximately 17,000 nuclear weapons. Disposition will be subject to IAEA monitoring and will transform the material into forms that cannot be used for nuclear weapons.

President Obama has accompanied this steady drawdown of fissile material stocks with an accelerated focus on securing fissile material worldwide— a high level, international focus, which he initiated at the Nuclear Security Summit in 2010, followed by the Seoul Summit in 2012. We look forward to the next summit in The Hague.

In short, the U.S. and Russia, the two countries with the largest fissile material stocks have been reducing our stockpiles over the course of many years--more specifically in the 18 years since the Shannon Mandate. The old debate over FMCT scope in the CD is behind the curve in this respect. Attempts to address existing stocks multilaterally and link them to a ban on new production for weapons purposes will only complicate consensus on beginning a negotiation on an FMCT -- we know that and have chosen to address stocks by other means. Furthermore, the longer production is not banned, the more stocks will accrue in countries, unlike the United States, that have not imposed a moratorium on production. All of this said, we are well aware that others have a differing view on the scope issue. That is what negotiations are for. It is not possible to resolve such difficult issues before negotiations even begin. Efforts to do so seem to have the effect, whether by design or inadvertently, of preventing negotiations.

As others here today, we have begun the 2013 session of the CD with renewed commitment to the negotiation of an FMCT, despite the stagnation of this body the last many years. Negotiations in the CD would neither discount nor override the national security concerns of any member; on the contrary, the security interests of all are assured by consensus in this Conference. Of course, our deliberations here today, no matter how substantive, are not a substitute for negotiations. The CD should take this important step in multilateral nuclear disarmament and initiate FMCT negotiations as soon as possible. We are ready to launch them.

Let me just close by referring to the issue I discussed last week – that we share the same commitment and passion for a world without nuclear weapons with other like-minded states and
our colleagues in civil society. We may have different views of the path to achieve that world, but let us not lose sight of the fact that we are partners. I would like to thank just one of those partners, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom/Reaching Critical Will, in particular, for their work documenting our deliberations here. And, I thank Ms. Beatrice Fihn personally for her statement, which I particularly appreciated as a committed feminist.