Thank you Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General and thank you for the message of SYG Ban-Ki Moon that “another year of stalemate in the CD is unacceptable”. We agree. I would like to extend my congratulations to you Ambassador Dekany for Hungary’s assumption of the CD Presidency at the outset of the 2013 CD session. This is indeed a challenging time for the Conference, and the U.S. is fully confident that you and your delegation will rise to the challenges ahead, though I must say, I do not envy you. Let me assure you Mr. President of the full support of the United States as you undertake this difficult task.

We begin the New Year with renewed commitment to the goal of a world without nuclear weapons – a goal which my President has made a hallmark of his international security agenda. In his inaugural address on January 21, President Obama spoke broadly of the importance of “collective action” in dealing with new challenges, and the value of engagement. He talked of “the obligation to shape the debates of our time…with common effort and common purpose.” In speaking to Americans, he stated that no nation “has a greater stake in a peaceful world.”

Turning to the CD, we cannot discount the fundamental challenges the Conference is facing, nor treat 2013 as just another year and today as just another CD opening session. We cannot see 2013 as “no different” from 2012 or any other year since 1996 when the CD last fulfilled its negotiating mandate upon conclusion of the CTBT.

The reality is very different. The 2012 UNGA First Committee reflected the cumulative frustration among many in the international community with years of CD deadlock and the steady attrition of its credibility. The UNGA adopted two resolutions, on FMCT and nuclear disarmament, which mandate UNGA mechanisms to address these respective “core” CD issues. While not enthusiastic about growing UNGA involvement, the United States assessed that the Canadian-sponsored FMCT resolution establishing a Group of Government Experts (GGE), a standard practice based on consensus decision making, included sufficient safeguards that would not undermine prospects for the CD to engage on this vital objective. Indeed, the GGE could complement CD efforts to make progress on FMCT in a manner that the CD can – we hope – take up. We did not find this to be the case with the Open-Ended Working Group on nuclear disarmament, which is not consensus based, circumvents the Conference, and re-directs its resources.

Despite the challenges facing this body, the goals which this Conference was designed to tackle are worth fighting for. There are those who think the CD can survive in its current immobilized state and there are those who think the CD is a failed experiment, beyond saving. Both of these views reinforce the status quo of inaction, which will most certainly destroy the Conference.

The United States does not share either view. We continue to value the Conference as the preferred forum for negotiation of an FMCT, the next practical step for multilateral nuclear disarmament. The CD is uniquely situated to negotiate an FMCT as it operates by consensus,
which ensures equitable protection of national security interests in a negotiation, and includes the key states affected by such an agreement. That said, “uniqueness” is not a substitute for results. For as we witnessed last fall in New York, the multilateral arms control and disarmament vacuum created by the CD’s inaction is starting to be filled by other processes and mechanisms. Regarding the CD’s future, the often used phrase “time is running out” may be more accurate than ever.

An overwhelming majority of this Conference supports the early commencement of FMCT negotiations as iterated as far back as 1978 in the first Special Session on Disarmament. The United States continues to consult with key partners to find a way to reach consensus in the CD and move forward on an FMCT. As Secretary of State Clinton said when addressing the CD in 2011, we believe that an FMCT is “too important a matter to be left in a deadlock forever.” It is now 2013 and past time to advance this core international goal, which must be integral to any CD program of work.

We do not discount the importance of other “core” issues on the CD’s agenda: nuclear disarmament, Negative Security Assurances (NSAs), and Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS). We are willing to engage in substantive discussions on each of these issues in the CD as part of a consensus Program of Work. In the meantime, the United States has taken practical steps to advance each of these issues. In the area of space security, we continue to pursue pragmatic bilateral and multilateral transparency and confidence-building measures in this regard, and support the work of the UN GGE under the distinguished chairmanship of our Russian colleague, as well as the negotiation of an International Code of Conduct. The United States also continues to support the extension of Negative Security Assurances through Protocols to Nuclear Weapons Free Zone treaties. We remain committed to signing the Protocol to the Southeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) as soon as possible and are prepared to consult with the parties to the Central Asian zone on resolving outstanding issues.

Let me take this opportunity to assure you that the United States continues to work with our partners, the “co-conveners,” and Ambassador Laajava – for whose wise and tireless leadership we must all be indebted – to create the conditions for a meaningful conference on a Middle East WMD-free zone. We regret that it was necessary to postpone – I must stress, “postpone,” not “cancel” – the conference despite our best efforts. We stand by our commitment to hold a meaningful Conference that includes all states of the region. To get us to this goal at the earliest possible date, we urge the states of the region to engage directly with each other to bridge the conceptual differences on approaches toward regional security and arms control arrangements.

Finally, with respect to nuclear disarmament, the U.S. record speaks for itself. Working with our partner, Russia, no country has taken deeper and broader reductions to its nuclear arsenal. The United States is continuing to work toward further, deeper reductions. Since 2009, we have worked with our P-5 partners to advance a regular dialogue on nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation, confidence-building measures and verification. We were pleased to host the June 2012 P-5 Conference on NPT implementation in Washington and are delighted that Russia will host the next P-5 Conference, in Geneva in April in the context of the NPT Prepcom. I note there has also been a very active P-5 intercessional agenda, including a working group on nuclear definitions led by China and other efforts by the UK and France related to transparency and verification. The dynamic that has developed among the five nuclear-weapon states within the
P5 Conference process is important for establishing a firm foundation to build a broader multilateral approach to arms control.

We hope to see this broader multilateral approach reflected in the work of the CD and trust that you, Mr. President will help guide the work of the Conference toward this end.

Finally, a warm welcome to our new colleagues. I am also delighted to see with us today our 2013 Chair for the BWC, Ms. Judit Kromi of Hungary, we look forward to her leadership along with our distinguished vice chairs from Malaysia and Switzerland

Thank you Mr. President.