

**2017 session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC)**

**Opening Statement  
Delegation of the United States of America**

April 3, 2017  
New York, New York

Thank you, Madame Chairperson.

On behalf of the United States Delegation, please allow me to congratulate you and the Government of Argentina on your election to Chair the 2017 session of the UN Disarmament Commission. Madame Chairperson, your expertise in this field is well known and well regarded, and we look forward to working with you as you ably discharge your important duties. And let us express our appreciation to Mr. Kim Won-soo, High Representative for Disarmament, for his support of this important body. Madame Chairperson, this year's UNDC session straddles two other multilateral events relevant to our own work: The nuclear ban treaty negotiations, which just ended its first meeting last week here in New York, and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty's (NPT) first Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) meeting for the 2020 NPT Review Conference (RevCon), which begins on May 2. At this opportune moment, please allow me to explain the U.S. position toward both of these processes.

**Nuclear Ban Treaty Negotiations:**

2016 Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on nuclear disarmament:

The 2016 Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on nuclear disarmament, which did not operate by consensus, produced a final report that predictably included language calling for a nuclear weapons ban treaty. Countries leading the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons (HINW) initiative used this language as the basis for a resolution (UNGAR 71/258) at the 2016 First Committee to launch negotiations for a nuclear weapons ban treaty, which began on March 27. Importantly, the OEWG report, the UNGA resolution, and now the negotiations themselves have all been opposed by a significant number of states, including both nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states. The element of consensus that underpins successful disarmament initiatives is entirely lacking. We opposed the report and

note that many other countries joined us in opposition to this ill-conceived endeavor.

Madame Chairperson,

A ban treaty will come at enormous cost to the NPT political process without securing the elimination of a single nuclear warhead or improving the security of any state; it risks deepening the divide between states, polarizing the political environment on nuclear disarmament, and further complicating future prospects for achieving consensus, whether in the NPT review process, the UN, or the Conference on Disarmament.

Moreover, a ban treaty ignores the essential connection between disarmament and international security conditions, a connection that is acknowledged in the NPT's preamble and in consensus decisions of its review conferences. By doing so, it seeks to delegitimize the extended deterrence relationships on which many of our allies rely. For these reasons, the United States opposed the OEWG, opposed the ban treaty resolution, and will not participate in ban treaty negotiations.

### **The NPT and the upcoming PrepCom**

Madam Chairperson,

The NPT remains the cornerstone of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime. Without the nonproliferation guarantees that it was designed to help ensure, it will be impossible to achieve the disarmament goals that remain our long-term objective. We look forward to the first PrepCom meeting for the 2020 RevCon. As we approach the 50th anniversary of the entry into force of the NPT in 2020, it is important to recall the NPT's role in helping prevent the further spread of nuclear weapons and providing enormous security benefits to all states. We urge all NPT Parties to reflect on how the NPT supports our common, fundamental interests and how all can contribute to strengthening the NPT in defense of these interests.

As the 2020 review process gets under way, there is a clear need to restore balance to the NPT dialogue. The United States is in the midst of a review, the purpose of which is to consider those approaches to best achieve that outcome in support of enhancing national security. We urge all NPT Parties to reject the false divisions over the best way to proceed on disarmament and the Middle East, so that they do not hamper consensus during this NPT review cycle. Together, we must engage in

a respectful dialogue, requiring that we not only defend and explain our own points of view, but also genuinely listen to the points of view of others. Indeed, there is much discussion and listening needed from all Parties in seeking to advance our common interests, including on cases of noncompliance, expanding nuclear arsenals in some countries, the difficult international security environment, achieving conditions that facilitate progress on disarmament, and applying nuclear energy to meet sustainable development goals.

## **Consensus**

It is unfortunate that in recent years, some have suggested that multilateral arms control, disarmament, and nonproliferation can be pursued without the consensus of all participants. The abandonment by some States and many NGOs of the consensus approach in this field because it is “too difficult” or “taking too long” is a major source of the division that we are facing today, has been counterproductive to making real progress on disarmament, and should be rejected. We should take up once again the culture of consensus-building and consensus decision-making that has yielded far more successes over the last 50 years than disappointments and will do so again – if we are patient and persistent.

## **2017 UNDC Agenda**

Madame Chairperson, this year, we are set to conclude work on the Commission’s current triennial issue cycle, which has focused since 2015 on two long-standing agenda items: In Working Group I (WG I), “Recommendations for achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons,” and in Working Group II (WG II), “Practical confidence-building measures [CBMs] in the field of conventional weapons.” We thank our colleagues from Kazakhstan and Morocco, respectively, for their effective Chairmanships of these working groups over the last two years, and will continue to work actively with the representatives of Bulgaria and Venezuela, also respectively, as they assume these posts in this critical, final year of our present agenda.

Last year, both Working Group Chairs drafted non-papers for our ongoing consideration. Our deliberations on the topics before us have been frank and useful. From the U.S. perspective, and because of a number of ongoing or forthcoming national policy reviews, some of the language in the existing non-papers will need to be altered or removed so that we can arrive at a consensus outcome in three weeks’ time. While this will not be an easy task, if we work

together, and are modest in our ambitions, this Commission can yield a positive result.

### **Outer Space TCBMs**

Madame Chairperson, the United States was pleased that UNGA Resolution 71/82, which conveyed the UNDC's annual report to the UNGA, also contained a provision encouraging the Commission to hold informal consultations at the 2017 session on the practical implementation of transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities. We are prepared to engage substantively in these discussions, and encourage others to do the same.

### **Conclusion**

Madame Chairperson, as we work to finalize our efforts on the issues before the UN Disarmament Commission this year, the United States pledges to do all it can to facilitate a positive outcome. We look forward to working with you and the members of the Commission as we pursue this important objective.

Thank you for your kind attention.