Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

On behalf of the United States Delegation, I congratulate you and the Netherlands on your election as Chair of the 70th UN General Assembly First Committee. We pledge our full support as you ably guide the important work of this body. We also welcome the election of the other members of the Committee’s Bureau, and look forward to working with them as well.

The U.S. commitment to a world without nuclear weapons

At the outset of my remarks, let me assure you of my nation’s commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons. To achieve this long-term goal, the United States is pursuing a full-spectrum, pragmatic approach. By steadily reducing the role and number of nuclear weapons in a way that advances strategic stability, we foster the conditions and opportunities for further progress.

Mr. Chairman, the numbers tell the real story: the United States has reduced its total stockpile of active and inactive nuclear warheads by 85% from its Cold War peak, from 31,255 nuclear weapons in 1967 to 4,717 as of September 30, 2014. More work needs to be done, but these results speak louder than any words – we have made significant progress.

This process and the wider regime established to prevent nuclear proliferation, have always underpinned our deep understanding of the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons use. That is why we are committed to use every available avenue to pursue further progress on disarmament and arms control. And even as the steady implementation of the New START Treaty proceeds, the President has made clear his willingness to seek further reductions of up to one-third below those
New START levels. But we have also made clear that progress in that direction requires a willing partner and a strategic environment conducive to further reductions.

In contrast to our full-spectrum approach, proposals such as a nuclear weapons ban or convention cannot succeed because they fail to recognize the need to develop the verification capabilities and build the security conditions for progress on disarmament. Instead, they risk creating a very unstable security environment, where misperceptions or miscalculations could escalate crises with unintended and unforeseen consequences, not excluding the possible use of a nuclear weapon. We must focus our efforts on realistic and achievable objectives that can make the world a safer place.

Disarmament must factor in humanitarian and security considerations

Mr. Chairman, we share the frustrations regarding the pace of disarmament, but it would be a mistake to allow this frustration to propel us toward the false choice that nuclear weapons are either a humanitarian or a security issue – they are both. Our pursuit of nuclear disarmament takes this into account.

Despite what some people think, nuclear deterrence and nuclear disarmament are actually complementary. Nuclear deterrence seeks to constrain threats as we work to reduce nuclear weapons and shore up efforts to prevent further proliferation. Both ultimately seek to prevent the use of nuclear weapons.

That is why President Obama made clear in Prague that even as we work toward the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons, so long as such weapons exist, the United States will maintain a safe, secure, and effective arsenal to deter any adversary and guarantee the defense of our allies.

We declare our unwavering support to the NPT and its goals, including nuclear disarmament

Mr. Chairman, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) continues to play a critical role in global security and provides the foundation for our efforts to achieve a world without nuclear weapons.

We are continuing to uphold the NPT’s Article VI disarmament undertaking “to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to...nuclear disarmament.” But while we recognize that more needs to be done, we do not
accept the notion that there is any "legal gap" in our fulfillment of these undertakings.

At the NPT Review Conference (RevCon) in May, our reason for not joining consensus had to do with the language concerning a Middle East WMD-free zone. While the United States supports this worthy goal, it cannot be imposed from outside the region or absent the consent of the involved states. Like similar zones in other regions, it can only succeed if it reflects the accepted norm that such zones should be based on arrangements freely arrived at by the states of the region. Be assured that we will continue our work to identify opportunities for regional dialogue and encourage a way forward that takes into consideration the legitimate interests of all states in the region.

Post-NPT RevCon, more dialogue is needed

Mr. Chairman, the NPT RevCon experience confirmed our long-held belief that we need more genuine international dialogue and engagement on nuclear disarmament issues, including between the nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States.

As envisioned in the RevCon’s draft final document, the United States is prepared to support an Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) to identify and elaborate all effective measures that contribute to our shared nuclear disarmament goals. There are, naturally, a wide range of views on the purpose of such an OEWG; this reflects differences among states on how to take forward nuclear disarmament. We will not settle those differences at this First Committee. But we can improve the quality of debate through support for an OEWG resolution that encourages the widest possible participation. Let’s not lose this opportunity for engagement.

Mr. Chairman, as a further contribution to this dialogue and cooperation, last December the United States and the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) launched the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification. This exciting new endeavor brings together twenty-seven states – nuclear and non-nuclear-weapon States alike – committed to exploring the tools and technologies needed to effectively verify future nuclear disarmament agreements. While, of course, this dialogue does NOT involve the sharing of any sensitive nuclear weapons-related information, we are convinced there is a role that non-nuclear-weapon States can play in this area.
We look forward to the 2nd plenary of the Partnership, to be held in Oslo, Norway this November. And on October 14, the United States and NTI will co-host a First Committee side-event to update states and civil society on Partnership progress and next steps.

Advancing our nuclear disarmament efforts through the P5 process

Mr. Chairman, when the final chapter of the age of nuclear weapons is written, history will record that the P5 process was among the earliest successful efforts to enhance the type of multilateral transparency, dialogue, confidence-building, and mutual understanding needed for future progress toward the verifiable elimination of nuclear weapons. Together, the P5 are pursuing intensified engagement that is essential in setting the foundation to advance nuclear disarmament. We look forward to discussing these and other issues at the P5 process side-event to be hosted by France on October 16.

Outer space security and sustainability

Mr. Chairman, turning to outer space matters, the United States will use this year’s First Committee session to advance space security and sustainability. The October 22 joint ad hoc meeting of the First and Fourth Committees will be an ideal opportunity to engage UN Member States on this important topic. This meeting was set up as a direct result of the work of the Group of Governmental Experts on Outer Space Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures, and we encourage Member States to come to the meeting prepared to discuss their implementation of such measures.

Conclusion

Finally, Mr. Chairman, up to now I have tried to focus on the positive. But I cannot end without pointing out that the accusations leveled by the Russian representative against my country last Friday are utterly baseless. U.S. missile defense is not directed against Russia’s or China’s strategic nuclear forces. Over many years, the United States has put very forward-leaning proposals on the table for cooperation with Russia on missile defense. However, Russia has refused all offers and instead has made absolutely unacceptable demands upon the United States and its allies as a precondition for any cooperation. Furthermore, the United States has always been, and remains, in full compliance with all of its NPT and INF Treaty obligations. We have many times publicly and privately explained why this is the case and our Russian colleagues may feign misunderstanding but
the facts couldn’t be any clearer. In our political system, arms control treaty provisions are the law of the land. And the United States is a nation governed by the rule of law.

Russia’s accusations are a classic attempt at misdirection, as it is Russia that is flagrantly violating key provisions of international law and undermining international security. Russia continues to violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, a breach of the UN Charter. Russia is in violation of the INF Treaty, as it has tested a new ground-launched cruise missile that is explicitly prohibited by this treaty. And it is Russia that has failed to respond to President Obama’s proposal to negotiate further reductions in our strategic and tactical nuclear forces. The United States remains committed to advancing toward a world without nuclear weapons and furthering international security, but we need a willing and sincere partner.

Thank you for your kind attention.