Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

On behalf of the United States Delegation, I congratulate you and Algeria on your election as Chair of the 71st UN General Assembly First Committee. We pledge our full support as you ably guide the important work of this body.

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

In 2009, President Obama spoke in Prague about his vision to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons, a goal that the President reiterated in his historic visit to Hiroshima earlier this year. Towards that end, we have steadily reduced the role and number of nuclear weapons in a way that maintains strategic stability, and creates the conditions and opportunities for further progress.

Mr. Chairman, one need not look further than the numbers to see that we have produced results: 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 4,571 as of 2015. The work of disarmament continues steadily, without headlines or fanfare. More work needs to be done, but these results speak louder than any words – we have made significant progress.

Successful implementation of the New START Treaty continues to dismantle Russian and U.S. nuclear weapons every day. The United States and Russia are building confidence through the verification regime and are expected to meet the central limits of the Treaty when they take effect in February 2018, capping U.S. and Russian forces at their lowest level since the 1950s. The President has made clear his willingness to seek further reductions of up to one-third below those New
START levels. We have also made clear that progress in that direction requires a willing partner and a strategic environment conducive to further reductions. Those conditions do not currently exist.

While we understand and share the disappointment of others with the pace of progress, frustration is not a compelling reason to abandon an approach to reductions which builds upon decades of pragmatic steps to reduce the role and number of nuclear weapons. There is now a proposal to abandon this proven course in favor of a nuclear weapons ban. Such a path is polarizing and forsakes long-standing principles of credible nuclear disarmament, such as verifiability. That is not a recipe for success when dealing with nuclear weapons.

Nuclear disarmament will only be achieved through an approach that takes into account the views and the security interests of all states. Consensus is the only practical way forward. That is why the United States rejects the final report from the Open-Ended Working Group on nuclear disarmament (OEWG) and we call on other states to do so.

Additionally, it's critical to note that you cannot separate nuclear disarmament from the overarching security environment. Indeed, the most significant progress on nuclear disarmament has occurred when the underlying security circumstances allowed for it. For example, it was the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s and early 1990s that allowed for us to negotiate and conclude the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in 1987, the first Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty in 1991 (START I), and the second Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START II) in 1993.

Furthermore, those who say that a nuclear weapons ban is favored by the majority of countries of the world overlook the billions of people who reside in countries that count on nuclear weapons as a deterrent or who are protected by an extended deterrent.

**Disarmament must factor in humanitarian and security considerations**

Mr. Chairman, the proponents of a ban treaty have painted the issue as a false choice between the view that nuclear weapons are either a humanitarian or a security issue — in fact, they are both. Our pursuit of nuclear disarmament takes this into account.

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. In the course of reducing our nuclear arsenal, the weapons that remain will continue to serve their fundamental role of deterring the use of nuclear weapons against us or our allies and partners.

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. 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.

**International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification**

In addition to the proven approaches to disarmament, the United States is committed to creating new ones that will help us reach our goals. That is why we are proud to partner with others through the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification (IPNDV). Effective verification is a key feature of any successful arms control agreement. The requirements for verification have and will continue to become more demanding as the number of parties increases and the numbers of weapons and the size of the accountable objects decreases.

Now in its second year, the Partnership has made significant progress on these challenges. More than 25 countries have participated so far, bringing to bear a wide range of expertise working to create an effective foundation for nuclear disarmament verification.

**Advancing our nuclear disarmament efforts through the P5 process**

We are also working together with other NPT nuclear-weapon States to strengthen the Treaty and make progress on our Article VI commitments. Mr. Chairman, since the P5 process was launched in 2009, we have taken steps to enhance multilateral transparency, dialogue, confidence-building, and mutual understanding to pave the way for future progress toward the verifiable elimination of nuclear weapons.

Just three weeks ago, the P5 met in Washington for the seventh P5 Conference, where we agreed to convene a P5 discussion of nuclear doctrine and policy here in New York on October 6, and to undertake further activities on the Glossary of Key Nuclear Terms. We also released a parallel P5 Statement expressing support for the entry-into-force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and worked with our partners here in New York to pass a UN Security Council Resolution supporting the CTBT and its verification system.
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 United States continues to pursue a range of bilateral and multilateral transparency and confidence-building measures (TCBMs) to encourage responsible behavior and strengthen stability in outer space.

One promising area is the continued implementation of the recommendations of the 2013 UN Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) study of TCBMs. We have submitted our views on implementing the GGE’s recommendations to the Conference on Disarmament as well as to the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space in October 2014. We urge governments to submit their views on outer space TCBMs to the UN Secretary General by next year.

Conclusion

To conclude, the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons will not be easily reached. The challenges we face are technical and political in nature and none can be separated from the broader international security environment. While progress may be slower than we would like, we cannot lose sight of the very real successes we have had and will continue to have.

Thank you.