Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Responsible State use of conventional weapons contributes to global and regional security and stability. However, in the wrong hands, these tools of security are a source of global and regional destabilization. The international community must cooperate to reduce risks posed by illicitly traded small arms and light weapons (SA/LW) and related ammunition. SA/LW and ammunition characteristics are fundamentally different, requiring distinct approaches to safety, security, and preventing diversion. The United States maintains a robust conventional weapons destruction (CWD) program that tailors its activities to the threat. We look forward to both the 2020 biennial meeting of the Program of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons and the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on problems arising from the accumulation of ammunition stockpiles in surplus, as opportunities to address issues raised by illicitly traded or unsecure SA/LW and ammunition stockpiles.

Man-Portable Air Defense Systems (MANPADS) remain a significant SA/LW threat—the absence of recent incidents against civilian aircraft should not be viewed as a reason to lessen our efforts. The United States continues to undertake focused work with partners to deter illicit trafficking and use of MANPADS, including through training programs for border security forces, destruction of excess State-held stocks, inclusion of MANPADS in CWD programs, and assisting with the mitigation of MANPADS threats near critical civilian aviation sites.

States must act responsibly not only in their use of weapons, but also in their transfers of weapons. The UN Register of Conventional Arms is the cornerstone of international transparency and confidence-building efforts on conventional arms. We applaud the work of the 2019 GGE in reviewing the UN Register. The decision to report SA/LW on the same basis as the traditional categories means that the Register now includes the weapons that the world regards as threatening and
destabilizing in excessive quantities. The GGE also reviewed the utility of the Register to ensure that it is fit for purpose after more than 25 years of operation, and we urge all States to demonstrate that it is by reporting to the Register.

While we continue to address traditional conventional weapons threats, emerging technologies bring new opportunities and challenges to security and stability. As technology develops, some entities try to skirt controls. And many nations developing advanced technology balance protecting technologies with promoting trade and cooperation. We should seek ways to jointly address these concerns.

Some States have expressed concerns regarding lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS). We have engaged in the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) GGE on Emerging Technologies in the Area of LAWS since its inception in 2017, and are prepared to continue. The GGE has made significant progress on this complex topic, and we urge the CCW High Contracting Parties to endorse the recommendations in the 2019 GGE report, in particular to continue the GGE’s work through 2021. As a community, we should work to understand better the potential risks and benefits that are presented by weapons with autonomous functions in terms of compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

The U.S. military has robust programs and processes to implement IHL and goes to extraordinary efforts to reduce civilian casualties in military operations. Advanced technologies that enable more accurate battlespace awareness and the discriminate use of force have been shown to improve the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Being willing to invest in such capabilities, along with the implementation of other good practices can improve protections for civilians.

The United States participated in the recent Vienna Conference on Protecting Civilians in Urban Warfare. We support the sharing of good practices on civilian protection and compliance with IHL. In our view, an effort to ban or stigmatize the use of explosive weapons is impractical and counterproductive because it could hamper efforts to protect civilians from bad actors like ISIS, or encourage bad actors to use human shields and to hide in urban areas. Sharing and promoting good practices through non-political, military-to-military exchanges should be our common focus.

Lastly, clearing explosive hazards contributes to stability and protects civilians. The United States is the single largest financial contributor to CWD efforts. Since 1993, we have provided more than $3.4 billion in assistance to more than 100 countries to reduce excess arms and ammunition from State stockpiles, to improve
stockpile security, and to remediate explosive hazards. We plan to provide further support, particularly as humanitarian mine action plays an increasing role in our effort to deliver stabilization assistance in both post-conflict and conflict zones.