Statement by the United States in Cluster 2: Nonproliferation

Second Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

Statement by Ambassador Robert A. Wood
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Mr. Chairman,

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is an enduring foundation for the common security interests of all states. While the work of nonproliferation is incomplete and imperfect, what we have achieved through the NPT, and in building the broader nuclear nonproliferation regime, has made us immeasurably safer and more secure. This success was not a foregone conclusion, and it is not something we can afford to take for granted.

Sustaining and advancing the Treaty’s core nonproliferation goals requires our collective determination to strengthen international safeguards, implement robust export controls that keep pace with changes in technology, and respond resolutely to proliferation challenges we continue to face, including in cases of noncompliance. Those efforts directly benefit our shared security, enable the peaceful use of nuclear technology, and help create the conditions for nuclear disarmament.

Mr. Chairman,

The NPT is the foundation of the nuclear nonproliferation regime, and international safeguards are one of its cornerstones. Article III of the Treaty requires States Party to conclude safeguards agreements with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in order to ensure that nuclear materials and activities remain in peaceful uses. However, the safeguards system has evolved since the signing of the Treaty, in response to a number of challenges. These include clandestine nuclear programs, illicit transfer of nuclear materials and fuel cycle equipment and technology, and revolutionary leaps forward in technology. The Additional Protocol (AP) requires states to provide expanded information about, and access to, all nuclear-related activities in a state so that the IAEA can
provide assurances that there are no undeclared nuclear materials or activities in that state. This is in line with the verification goal set out in Article III: to ensure that safeguards are applied to all nuclear material, “with a view to preventing diversion of nuclear energy from peaceful uses to nuclear weapons.”

As of today, 132 countries have an Additional Protocol in force. Sixteen others have signed the AP. Given its widespread adoption, its intrinsic connection to the purposes of the NPT, and lessons learned from past proliferation challenges, the AP is the de facto standard for assuring compliance with the Treaty’s safeguards obligations. Those who raise objections to the AP or who craft treaties that ignore this essential standard are increasingly out of step with what it takes to achieve the ultimate goals of the NPT, and undermine both the efficacy of the safeguards system and the nonproliferation confidence needed to facilitate peaceful uses.

We commend Honduras, Senegal, and Thailand for bringing their Additional Protocols into force, and Liberia and Algeria for signing theirs. For those NPT Parties that have not yet concluded a Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement, we urge them to do so as soon as possible, to conclude an Additional Protocol and, where applicable, to adopt the modified version of the Small Quantities Protocol. We also call on nuclear suppliers to do their part to advance the goals of the NPT. It is high time for the AP to become a standard condition for nuclear cooperation, and we call on those suppliers who have not yet done so to join us in making the AP a requirement for nuclear exports. We look forward to the AP becoming a multilateral standard for nuclear supply.

The United States understands that establishing the legal and regulatory framework, technical expertise, and institutional procedures necessary to conclude and implement safeguards agreements can sometimes place a significant strain on States. This is particularly true for those with limited capacity and resources. Fortunately, the IAEA provides assistance in this regard, including assessment and advisory services, safeguards training and outreach, and publication of guidance documents. The United States also conducts extensive training and outreach to build capacity and enable States to meet their safeguards obligations. This capacity building helps ensure that States interested in developing nuclear technology for peaceful uses can do so in conformity with the highest nonproliferation standards.

Ultimately, the cost of safeguards is modest compared to the enormous security and economic benefits of the IAEA’s assurances regarding the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. We call on all IAEA Member States to work together to ensure
that the IAEA has the resources and the political support it needs to carry out its safeguards mission and to develop new tools to keep pace with advancing technology and other proliferation challenges.

Mr. Chairman,

I urge everyone here to steer clear of the kind of zero-sum thinking that mistakenly pits nonproliferation against the other objectives of the Treaty. This is not only misguided but counterproductive. Withholding action on nonproliferation does nothing to stimulate action on disarmament or cooperation on peaceful uses of nuclear energy. To the contrary, nonproliferation creates the very conditions that are essential for those endeavors to thrive – just as foot-dragging on nonproliferation only makes these other benefits more difficult and elusive.

As we look to strengthen the nuclear nonproliferation regime, building on a half-century of success in order to meet future challenges, we must do so with the shared understanding that our efforts, if successful, will help create the conditions necessary to achieve further progress towards nuclear disarmament and to expand access to the peaceful uses of nuclear technology. We can only realize the safe and secure world to which we all aspire if we work together, based on shared interests, to preserve and advance the nonproliferation regime for future generations.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.