

**Statement by Ambassador Robert A. Wood
Delegation of the United States of America**

**71st UNGA First Committee
Thematic Discussion on Nuclear Weapons**

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

On April 5, 2009, in Prague, President Obama stated the U.S. commitment “to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons” and to take concrete steps to that end. The United States remains as committed as ever to this goal and to making progress on nuclear disarmament. We have made tremendous progress in reducing the number of nuclear weapons over the last 50 years. Though some are dissatisfied with the pace of disarmament, we remain convinced that the pragmatic and consensus-based approach that has successfully brought us to this point remains the right one going forward.

Today, some states believe the time has come to abandon this pragmatic and consensus-based approach and instead pursue a radically different path that would simply declare a ban on nuclear weapons. We must evaluate this new approach using the same criteria that we apply to our current one. Will it improve global security and stability or undermine it? Will it build a coalition for disarmament or fracture the international community? Will it lead to real reductions in nuclear weapons or be a treaty for political, not practical effect? How can such an approach be verified? The United States has carefully applied these questions to the ban treaty concept and it fails to successfully meet the necessary criteria for success on four counts.

First, a treaty banning nuclear weapons will not lead to any further reductions because it will not include the states that possess nuclear weapons. Advocates of a ban treaty say it is open to all, but how can a state that relies on nuclear weapons for its security possibly join a negotiation meant to stigmatize and eliminate them.

Second, a ban treaty would undermine existing nonproliferation and disarmament regimes. It risks creating an unbridgeable divide between states, polarizing the political environment on nuclear disarmament, and effectively limiting any future prospect for achieving consensus, whether in the NPT review process, the UN, or the CD. This deepening divide could impact other aspects of the NPT, including

strengthening cooperation in the peaceful applications of nuclear energy or ideas to reinforce the nonproliferation pillar, contributing to the growing tendency to treat the treaty's three pillars as competing priorities rather than reinforcing interests. Rejecting security considerations related to nuclear weapons leaves no room for discussion on 'effective measures' needed to sustain nuclear disarmament progress, thereby discouraging, not promoting, needed dialogue.

Third, verification regimes are one of the key components of successful nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation agreements. The ability to verify provides the confidence needed to make further reductions while maintaining regional and global security. The United States is working actively to address the very real challenges of verifying future arms control agreements including through the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification, which includes both nuclear weapon states and non-nuclear weapon states. One thing that is clear today, however, is that we have not overcome the challenges or built the capacity needed to effectively verify a treaty banning all nuclear weapons.

Finally, a ban treaty runs the risk of undermining regional security. We cannot deny the reality that nuclear weapons continue to play a role in maintaining peace and stability in some parts of the world. We ignore that reality at our peril. This could further foster uncertainty in regions as states are forced to reevaluate their security environment. It is unrealistic to ask non-nuclear weapon states and nuclear weapon states alike to reject their current security arrangements without addressing the underlying security concerns that led them to seek such arrangements in the first place.

Some make a false assertion of a 'legal gap' in implementation of the NPT; in crafting the Art VI obligation for "good faith negotiations," negotiators recognized they could not prescribe the modalities for eliminating nuclear weapons, given the need to account for prevailing security conditions. Successive agreements or unilateral steps to reduce nuclear arsenals and reliance on them have proven the wisdom of this approach.

The current challenge to nuclear disarmament is not a lack of legal instruments. The challenges to disarmament are a result of the political and security realities we presently face. The United States is ready to take additional steps including bilateral reductions with Russia and a treaty ending production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons. Unfortunately, some states are currently unwilling to engage in further nuclear reductions, and others are increasing their arsenals. At the same time, violations of international norms and existing agreements are

creating a more uncertain security environment and making the conditions for further reductions more difficult to achieve. A ban treaty will do nothing to address these underlying challenges.

For all of these reasons, the United States will vote "no" on any resolution establishing nuclear weapons ban treaty negotiations, and will not participate in the negotiations. We urge all others to do the same.

The world's nuclear weapons arsenals did not appear overnight and they will not be drawn down overnight. We cannot lose sight of the fact that while we might disagree on process, we all agree on the goal: the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons. In this spirit, let us all rededicate ourselves to doing the hard work together to create the conditions to make real nuclear disarmament possible.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.