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Remarks At the Conference on Disarmament

Remarks

Hillary Rodham Clinton

Secretary of State

Geneva, Switzerland

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Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you for your leadership and your efforts to make the Conference on Disarmament an effective tool for addressing the critical challenges we face today. I also want to thank the Secretary General for convening this important plenary session and for the opportunity to address you. And I owe a special thanks to our Ambassador Laura Kennedy and the U.S. mission here for their hard work in advancing President Obama's disarmament agenda.

Nearly 20 years after the end of the Cold War, the world has more than 20,000 nuclear weapons. As I speak to you today, centrifuges around the world are spinning out more enriched uranium, a still significant amount of it to weapons grade. Plutonium is being churned out in reactors and separated from spent fuel in reprocessing plants. The world faces no shortage of ingredients for nuclear bombs. Yet more fissile materials are made every single day.

The question before us today is whether we will – at last – agree to end the dedicated production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons. Halting production is in the interest of every country, and I urge this conference to end the stalemate and open negotiations on a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty without further delay.

The FMCT would be an important step toward creating the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons, a vision that President Obama laid out in Prague nearly two years ago, and it would build on the notable progress we have made together these past years.

The United Nations Security Council unanimously approved Resolution 1887 to strengthen the global nonproliferation regime. The United States released our Nuclear Posture Review that reduces the prominence of nuclear weapons in our national defense. We convened a Nuclear Security Summit, where 47 countries agreed to lock down vulnerable nuclear materials over four years, and we joined with other NPT members in a successful Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty Review Conference.

And of course, the United States and Russia brought the New START Treaty into force. That treaty will cut our deployed strategic warheads to the lowest numbers since the 1950s. It was my great pleasure to exchange the instruments of ratification with Minister Sergey Lavrov in Munich earlier this month. Our two countries are now positioned to discuss further arms control reductions, including nonstrategic and non-deployed nuclear weapons. We must not squander this momentum. We should continue to advance nuclear security by turning now to the negotiation of a verifiable ban on fissile

material production for bombs.

The United States has been committed to the Conference on Disarmament as the logical forum for this negotiation. This conference after all produced such landmark treaties as the Biological and Chemical Weapons Conventions, the NPT, and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. But the last treaty was completed in 1996. And this conference has been deadlocked ever since. The Program of Work agreed to in May 2009 remains stalled. And one single country – a country that is a friend and partner of the United States – continues to undermine the international consensus in favor of an FMCT.

I know this conference has always cherished the principle of consensus, which ensures that every state can defend its national interests at the negotiating table. But our patience is not infinite. There is no justification for a single nation to abuse the consensus principle and forever thwart the legitimate desire of the 64 other states to get negotiations underway on an agreement that would strengthen our common security. It is clear that there is a wide range of views inside the conference, and these views will have to be accommodated through the process of negotiation. That process will be difficult, and it will take a number of years, and it that is all the more reason to begin negotiations now. If we cannot summon the shared will even to begin negotiations in this body, then the United States is determined to pursue other options. Global nuclear security is too important to allow this matter to drift forever.

The FMCT is critical to our broader agenda. If we are serious about reducing the possibility that fissile material could fall into terrorists' hands, then we must reduce the amount of such material that is available. For that reason, the United States also supports reducing stocks of separated plutonium and highly enriched uranium and minimizing the future use of highly enriched uranium for civilian purposes. The United States has made significant progress towards those goals – both bilaterally with Russia and multilaterally – and we will continue to make them an important focus of U.S. nuclear diplomacy.

The United States is deeply committed to reducing nuclear weapons and the risk of nuclear proliferation. Our long-term goal, our vision, is a world without nuclear weapons. Now, we understand this will be difficult and it will certainly take time. But we believe it is attainable if we tackle each piece of the problem step by step.

Therefore, I ask each of your nations for support in strengthening global security by taking the next step – beginning negotiations on a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty. No nation has to agree to the treaty. But it is unacceptable for any nation to prevent other nations from pursuing what such a treaty could look like and what benefits it could produce for the world.

So I hope that we will see action now from this esteemed conference that has meant so much to the world over so many years. This is the forum; you are the leaders who should be making these decisions. It would be unfortunate if that were not to be pursued in terms of this particular treaty. And the United States stands ready to support the beginning of negotiations, to do whatever is necessary to try to accommodate legitimate national interests, and then to reach a resolution and the production of such a treaty, otherwise we believe this is too important a matter to be left in a deadlock forever.

So we thank you for your attention to this critical issue and we look forward to working with you as we continue the work of a Conference on Disarmament. Thank you very much.

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