

**Conference on Disarmament
1202nd Plenary Session**

February 3, 2011

U.S. Statement

Thank you Mr. President.

I welcome the opportunity afforded to this delegation and other delegations to address the issue of the conclusion of a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT) a vital objective which has been repeatedly endorsed by the international community.

We have spoken many times about why an FMCT is important, as have others in this body, but I think there is value in saying so again.

A Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty would place limits on the amount of fissile material available for use in nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. It would achieve this by banning the further production of fissile material for those purposes from the date of its entry into force. Such a limitation serves our shared disarmament and nonproliferation goals. It has long been recognized as an essential step toward a world without nuclear weapons.

The need for an FMCT has been emphasized by multiple NPT Review Conferences, most recently this past May, and it was a central point in President Obama's April 2009 Prague speech.

We must remember that FMCT is one step on a long path and it should focus on the principal objective of ceasing the future production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices. This is an essential and achievable step, and one that all states in this room can contribute to. The United States has taken many steps down this path, both on its own and together with Russia and others. It is unfortunate and frustrating that we have been unable to take the key multilateral step of capping weapons stockpiles. Such a cap is needed if we are to provide a firm foundation for deeper nuclear reductions.

In formulating our positions on the substance of the treaty, our goal is a non-discriminatory treaty that halts the production of fissile material for weapons, and is internationally verified.

There is broad agreement on the principle that there should be a treaty banning the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices. Negotiations are for the purpose of coming to agreement on how it will work in practice.

Pending the start of negotiations, there is useful work to be done to prepare the ground here in Geneva. We are eager to work with all CD members to have meaningful discussions of the technical issues of an FMCT for the purpose of advancing the CD toward negotiations.

Our experts are prepared to participate in these discussions, either in formal CD plenary or in meetings on the margins of the CD.

Even if this body is not yet prepared to begin formal negotiations, there is great value in holding in-depth discussions of technical issues related to an FMCT. At this point, for example, there are significant differences over how to define "fissile material." There are some who favor a narrow definition of weapons-grade plutonium and uranium; while others, the United States among them, who favor a definition that covers weapons-usable forms of plutonium and uranium and which corresponds to the IAEA definition of direct use material; and still others who favor yet more expansive definitions.

An FMCT must also recognize that there are legitimate civilian and military uses for fissile materials other than nuclear weapons or nuclear explosives devices.

The technical issues don't end there. The definition of fissile material is closely linked to the definition of production. The processes that produce materials usable in weapons are primarily isotopic separation of uranium – or enrichment – and chemical separation of plutonium from irradiated nuclear material – or reprocessing. That said, we must be sure that we are not so restrictive in the definition of "produce" that we leave open opportunities to circumvent the fundamental objective of the FMCT, while at the same time not being so expansive that we constrain activities that have no relation to an FMCT. A definition of production that covered spent fuel, for example, would add considerably to the cost of verifying a treaty without adding significantly to its effectiveness.

Defining fissile material and what it means to produce such material leads to a third fundamental issue: that of the definition of what constitutes a "production facility." FMCT verification will focus on such facilities, and therefore the treaty will require a definition that includes facilities that are producing or are clearly capable of producing fissile material. While resolution of such issues is properly left for negotiations, discussion of this broad area is timely now.

Mr. President, these are but a few of the issues we will have to grapple with in constructing an FMCT. There are many more that I have not listed. We will not be able to cover every aspect of an FMCT within one CD session, or even over the course of a year. But we must start somewhere, and we should carefully consider which issue with which to begin. Even the least divisive issues will take time to consider fully, and we should not rush our work with an artificial timetable.

In-depth discussion of technical issues can help build the foundation for future negotiations. I note that there were years of experts' discussions on issues relating to a test ban before formal negotiations on the CTBT got underway. Those discussions were crucial to the eventual success of the negotiations. And I understand that topics related to a Chemical Weapons Convention were explored for many years before there was a formal negotiating mandate. I do not mean to imply that the United States would be content with years of technical discussions as a substitute for formal negotiations. We see no substantive barrier to the start of negotiations now. The obstacles that exist are of a political nature. Until those obstacles can be overcome,

we see much value in engaging in technical discussions pending the commencement of formal negotiations.

We all know that negotiating an FMCT will be a long and difficult process. As we seek to begin that process, we should take every opportunity to prepare ourselves. Indeed, it is perhaps possible that engaging in technical discussions here in the CD may have the effect of convincing some who fear negotiations that they have, in fact, little to fear. In any case, we have substantial homework to do on FMCT.

Mr. President, the United States stands ready to fully engage in the work of preparing the ground for FMCT negotiations by reinforcing its delegation with experts from Washington to lend greater depth to discussions here in Geneva. We are delighted to be joined today by some of our colleagues from capitals. We look forward to engaging with all of you in the weeks and months to come.

Thank you Mr. President.