

United States

Explanation of vote – 27 October 2016

Before we begin voting today, I'd like to take a moment to reiterate the key elements of US policy regarding the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons – a goal we all seek. In 2009 in Prague, President Obama reaffirmed his commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons, a goal the president reiterated in his historic visit to Hiroshima earlier this year.

Toward that end, we have steadily reduced the role and number of nuclear weapons in a way that maintains strategic stability and creates the conditions and opportunities for further progress. The work of disarmament continues steadily without headlines or fanfare. More work needs to be done but the dramatic results achieved thus far speak louder than any words. We have made significant progress.

We understand that there is now disagreement on the process by which we achieve a nuclear-free world. However, the United States does not accept the premise underlying the call to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons found in L.41 and L.24, and while we respect the views of the proponents we disagree with the practicality of their approach and are concerned with the negative effects of seeking to ban nuclear weapons without consideration of the overarching international security environment. We understand and share the disappointment of others with the pace of progress. We must continue to support an approach to reductions which builds upon decades of pragmatic steps to reduce the role and number of nuclear weapons.

In our view, diverting focus from this proven course in favour a nuclear weapons ban would be both polarising and would forsake longstanding principles of credible nuclear disarmament, such as verifiability and is not the recipe for success when dealing with nuclear weapons.

In addition to the proven approaches to disarmament, the United States is committed to creating new ones that will help us reach our goals. That is why we are proud to partner with others for the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification. Effective verification is a key feature of any successful arms control agreement. The requirements for verification have and will continue to become more demanding as the number of parties increases and the number of weapons and the size of the accountable objects decreases. It is for this reason we are pleased to co-sponsor Norway's resolution on nuclear disarmament verification. We fully support the principles underlying this resolution and look forward to active participation with a group of government experts it establishes.

We are likewise pleased to again co-sponsor Japan's resolution on United Action to Eliminate Nuclear Weapons. In our view this resolution represents a good balance between the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons and a recognition of the necessary steps that must be taken to accomplish this goal.

The nuclear non-proliferation treaty continues to play a critical role in global security and provides the foundation for our efforts to achieve a world without nuclear weapons. While we recognise that more needs to be done, we do not accept the notion that there is any legal gap in our fulfilment of these undertakings. In crafting

the NPT, negotiators recognised they could not proscribe 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 political, technical and security realities we presently face. The United States is ready to take additional steps, including bilateral reductions with Russia and a treaty ending the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons. Unfortunately some states are currently unwilling to engage in further 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.

In conclusion, the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons will not be easily reached. The challenges we face cannot be separated from the broader international security environment. We cannot lose sight of the very real successes we have had and will continue to have. 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 the 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 verifiable and irreversible nuclear disarmament possible.