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USA: White Paper on a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty -- Conference on Disarmament

U.S. Mission to the UN, Geneva
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The United States believes strongly that achieving a legally binding ban on the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons is a desirable goal. One way to accomplish this goal would be through the negotiation at the Conference on Disarmament (CD) in Geneva of a treaty banning the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. We aim to conclude a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT) as soon as possible.

The United States has given considerable thought to what an FMCT should look like. The draft treaty that we have put forward sets forth the essentials needed for an FMCT that would meet the objective of ending expeditiously the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons. The basic obligation under such a treaty, effective at entry into force, would be a ban the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. Stocks of already existing fissile material would be unaffected by the FMCT. The production of fissile material for non-explosive purposes, such as fuel for naval propulsion, also would be unaffected by the treaty.

The definitions set forth in the U.S. draft treaty on "fissile material" and "production" represent the outgrowth of the decade-long international discussion regarding what an FMCT should encompass. We believe that the definitions set forth in that text are appropriate for the purposes of an FMCT without any provision for verification.

The U.S. draft treaty omits verification provisions, consistent with the U.S. position that so-called "effective verification" of an FMCT cannot be achieved. The ability to determine compliance with a high level of confidence is a requirement for effective verification. The United States has concluded that, even with extensive verification mechanisms and provisions -- so extensive that they could compromise the core national security interests of key signatories, and so costly that many countries would be hesitant to implement them -- we still would not have high confidence in our ability to monitor compliance with an FMCT.

Furthermore, mechanisms and provisions that provide the *appearance* of effective verification without supplying its *reality* could be more dangerous than having *no* explicit provisions for verification. Such mechanisms and provisions could provide a false sense of security, encouraging countries to assume that, because such mechanisms and provisions existed, there would be no need for governments themselves -- individually or collectively -- to be wary and vigilant against possible violations.

Negotiating an international ban on the future production of fissile material for nuclear weapons will be a difficult enough task, in and of itself. Avoiding time-consuming and, we believe, futile efforts to negotiate "effective" verification measures will expedite action by the CD to conclude a legally binding ban on the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons and nuclear explosive devices.

The United States believes that only by focusing on realistic objectives can the CD create the conditions necessary for negotiating an FMCT. The successful negotiation of an FMCT in the CD will be both a significant contribution to the global non-proliferation regime and an example of truly effective multilateralism.

The United States hopes that negotiations in Geneva on an FMCT can begin and conclude in the very near future. We also reiterate our view that, pending the conclusion of a Cutoff Treaty and the Treaty's entry into force, all states should declare publicly and observe a moratorium on the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons, such as the United States has maintained since 1988.

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