

U.S. Ambassador Bruce Turner's Remarks to the Conference on Disarmament on Negative Security Assurances

February 9, 2023

Thank you Mr. President,

The United States welcomes the opportunity to take the floor today to discuss the issue of negative security assurances.

We deeply appreciate the importance of providing security assurances to states that have forsworn nuclear weapons and that abide by their nuclear nonproliferation obligations. That is why the United States reaffirmed, without change, our longstanding negative security assurance policy in our most recent Nuclear Posture Review, released last October.

This transparent policy underscores our continued commitment not to use or threaten use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States Parties to the NPT that are in compliance with their nuclear nonproliferation obligations. We consider this commitment to be a substantial security benefit for such states.

The United States also understands that many states would want to go farther in the way of a legally binding agreement on negative security assurances. As I outlined at our plenary last week, the United States has made clear our support for such legally binding negative security assurances in the framework of a number of nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties.

That is why we have signed and ratified the two protocols to the Treaty of Tlatelolco, establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone that covers Latin America and the Caribbean. The United States has also signed the relevant protocols to the Treaties of Pelindaba, Rarotonga, and Semipalatinsk and is working to advance their ratification.

We are prepared to support further zones that are developed in accordance with the 1999 consensus principles and guidelines adopted by the United Nations Disarmament Commission, including the central principle that such zones be

established on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among all states of the region concerned.

To the question of “conditionality” applied to legally binding negative security assurances, I reiterate that the U.S. negative security assurance applies to all non-nuclear-weapon States Parties to the NPT which are in compliance with their nuclear nonproliferation obligations, irrespective of their membership in a nuclear-weapon-free zone. I am sure we can all agree that assurances intended to benefit parties to the NPT or to a nuclear-weapon-free zone treaty should be tied to compliance with those treaties. This also provides incentives for states to meet their treaty obligations and thereby benefits us all by reinforcing the nuclear nonproliferation regime.

In that regard, I would also call your attention to the P3 Joint Statement, which was mentioned earlier, on Security Assurances issued during the 2022 NPT Review Conference, in which the Governments of France, the United Kingdom, and the United States recognized and reiterated the principles I just outlined.

Mr. President,

In stark contrast to the United States’ and other P3 countries’ efforts to engage responsibly on negative security assurances, Russia has flagrantly disregarded the commitments and assurances it made in the Budapest Memorandum to respect the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Ukraine. This is, of course, in addition to its blatant violation of its obligation under Article 2(4) of the UN Charter.

Moreover, the commitments and assurances Russia made in the Budapest Memorandum were to the State of Ukraine, not a particular Ukrainian government, further highlighting Russia’s false and cynical assertions that its commitments and assurances do not apply to the current government of Ukraine. Ukraine has done nothing that would invalidate the Budapest Memorandum. Russia’s attempts to lay the blame on Ukraine for its supposed “crimes,” or any other transparent fabrication Russia attempts to use to justify its illegal war against Ukraine, is entirely inconsistent with the representations Russia made to Ukraine when Ukraine joined the NPT.

I would also note that Russia's disregard for its commitments impacts not only Ukraine, but calls into question the credibility of all of Russia's negative security assurances.

Given that the United States already has in place strong negative security assurances and supports making negative security assurances legally binding in the context of nuclear-weapon-free zones, my delegation believes there are more urgent issues for this body to discuss. That said, we hear and respect the views of others on this issue and are prepared to engage in further discussion on what some have identified as a priority. We would hope such discussions would include compliance and accountability in conjunction with commitments.

In return, however, we would ask others to respect our priorities. Our nuclear disarmament priority for this body, as articulated for decades by many in the CD, is to commence negotiation of a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty, or FMCT. Here there is a clear need given the expansion of nuclear weapons stockpiles underway in some states and the material contribution an FMCT would make toward the achievement of nuclear disarmament. Commencement of real work on this issue is long overdue. I would therefore suggest that discussion of negative security assurances be pursued in parallel with similar discussion of an FMCT, and that we treat the negotiation of an FMCT with the urgency it deserves.

The United States stands ready to work with all states toward the long-term goal of a world without nuclear weapons. To achieve this goal, we must work to improve the international security environment alongside our efforts to pursue practical steps on nuclear disarmament – of which negative security assurances are just one of many. We welcome all states to join us in seeking common solutions to these global collective challenges as we work to achieve a more peaceful future for all.

Thank you.