

**Statement by Mr. John A. Bravaco
Acting Head of Delegation
United States of America**

**Thematic Discussion on Regional Disarmament and Security
United Nations Headquarters, New York City
October 30, 2019**

Mr. Chairman,

Regional approaches provide important avenues to further disarmament, security and nonproliferation objectives. ASEAN's continued support for efforts toward the elimination of nuclear weapons and commitment to preserve the region as a nuclear weapon-free zone will be vital to address regional threats. China's expanding nuclear arsenal, estimated to more than double in the next decade, includes efforts to develop new low-yield nuclear weapons and nuclear-armed hypersonic missiles – all the while refusing to engage in substantive dialogue on nuclear arms control. China must come to realize that continued silence on its part is destabilizing.

Mr. Chairman,

Significant security challenges also persist in the Middle East region. Chief among these challenges are Iran's destabilizing activities, including its ballistic missile program, expansion of uranium enrichment activities, and support for terrorism; Syria's repeated use of chemical weapons against its own people and its utter disregard for its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention; and Syria's ongoing noncompliance with its IAEA safeguards agreement and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. We urge all the regional states to refocus attention on addressing these important real world security issues.

The United States continues to support the goal of a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction and delivery systems. We remain convinced, however, that efforts to advance this objective must be pursued by all the regional states concerned in an inclusive, cooperative, and consensus-based manner that takes into account the legitimate concerns of all regional states. In this regard, we deeply regret the UN General Assembly's adoption last year, in a divided vote, of an Arab Group-sponsored decision calling on the Secretary-General to convene a conference to negotiate a legally-binding treaty establishing a Middle East weapons of mass destruction-free zone. We regret that this decision was put forward without consensus support among the regional states and based on terms that were well-known to be unacceptable to other regional parties. We have been clear that, in the absence of participation by all regional states, the United States will not attend the conference and will regard any outcome of it as illegitimate.

In conclusion, none of us should be under the illusion that the long-term goal of the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons can be achieved without doing the hard work necessary to address these security challenges. We encourage all states to join us in reinvigorating that work by engaging in a realistic dialogue about the world as it is and the steps we can take to reshape it into the world we would like it to be. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.