

**U.S. Ambassador Bruce Turner's Remarks to the Conference on Disarmament on
Negative Security Assurances**
March 14, 2024

Chair,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak about Negative Security Assurances (NSAs), a subject that has gained renewed relevance following Russia's disregard of the assurances it provided to Ukraine under the Budapest Memorandum and its reckless nuclear rhetoric.

As you all know, the United States, in accordance with its declaratory policy as iterated in its 2022 Nuclear Posture Review, already offers a unilateral NSA to all non-nuclear-weapon states that are party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and in compliance with their nuclear nonproliferation obligations. Other NPT nuclear-weapon states have their own declaratory policies in this regard, some similar to ours, others quite different.

Furthermore, the United States has long supported nuclear-weapon-free zone (NWFZ) treaties in regions across the world as a way for states to take action themselves to improve the security environment in their respective regions and all but eliminate the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. We strongly encourage nuclear-weapon free zones that conform to the principles and guidelines on the establishment of such zones adopted by the United Nations Disarmament Commission in 1999, including the central principle that such zones be established on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among all states of the region concerned. Through the relevant protocols to such treaties, we provide legally binding negative security assurances.

On that basis, the United States has signed and ratified the two protocols to the Treaty of Tlatelolco that covers Latin America and the Caribbean. We have signed but not yet ratified the relevant protocols to the Treaty of Pelindaba for Africa, the Treaty of Rarotonga for the South Pacific, and the Treaty of Semipalatinsk for Central Asia. We also continue to engage with members of ASEAN to find a way forward on signature and ratification of the protocol to the Treaty of Bangkok for Southeast Asia.

The United States also remains committed to working with the regional states to advance the long-term goal of a Middle East free of all weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and delivery systems, to include nuclear weapons. While there are significant and well-known obstacles to achieving this goal, we remain convinced that it can still be achieved through regional cooperation and dialogue and on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at by all the states of the region.

Chair,

We have long argued that it is through mechanisms like these that negative security assurances are best provided. However, and as Under Secretary Jenkins stated during the most recent session of the High-Level Segment of the CD, the United States has duly noted the priority that

many states attach to renewed emphasis on negotiating a legal convention on negative security assurances, just as the United States and many others have put their priority on negotiating a fissile material production cutoff treaty, or FMCT. Even though we continue to believe that regional nuclear weapon-free zones, negotiated among the concerned parties, are the most expeditious and practical way simultaneously to bolster regional cooperation and nuclear disarmament, as we work to finally clear the path for FMCT negotiations, the United States would also be prepared to discuss the establishment of an ad hoc committee to negotiate on effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon states against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.

One of the questions that may arise for NPT non-nuclear-weapon states would be whether they would be prepared to agree to receive negative security assurances from NPT non-Parties that possess nuclear weapons. Would enabling those states to join an NSA convention effectively legitimize their possession of nuclear weapons? Or would they be excluded from adhering to an NSA convention unless they acceded to the NPT, in which case they would have to disarm and would be eligible to receive, but not provide, NSAs?

Also, if a state failed to comply with its IAEA safeguards agreement, such that there was a widespread concern that this state could acquire, and might have the intent to acquire, nuclear weapons at short notice, would you want that state to still be entitled to continue to receive negative security assurances from others?

Chair,

As evidenced by our questions, the United States believes that negative security assurance discussions are likely to prove complex and difficult. Core issues of the scope of the assurance would confront us at the outset of any negotiation, which would force us to tackle several extremely vexing and complicated issues that go to the heart of nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament.

Of course, it goes almost without saying that most nonproliferation and disarmament issues are difficult and complex, so we should remind ourselves that we were not sent here to manage easy problems.

Chair,

We understand that many states have put their priority on NSAs, just as the United States sees an urgent need for an FMCT negotiation. We should be working to create value for everyone. With compromise on both sides, we believe we can take on both. The United States, for its part, is ready to engage in good faith with a view to reaching an agreement on effective international arrangements around NSAs while also moving ahead with FMCT negotiations.

We encourage all CD members to join consensus in a decision allowing such discussions to move forward. Thank you, Chair.