**U.S. Acting Permanent Representative Aud-Frances McKernan Remarks to the**

**Conference on Disarmament on the Situation in Ukraine**

**March 3, 2022**

Thank you, Madame President.

And thank you for convening this formal plenary session today. The United States is deeply grateful for your professional leadership of the Conference on Disarmament during this difficult time.

I take the floor today to address a topic most relevant to the CD’s work: the Russian President’s deeply reckless and destabilizing decision to prosecute a war in Ukraine.

Given the threatening tone of President Putin’s rhetoric – including with regard to Russia’s nuclear forces – we believe this situation is absolutely appropriate for discussion in the Conference on Disarmament.  It is an immediate example of why transparency, risk reduction, and crisis management mechanisms – all things the United States has long championed – are so critical to international peace and security.

The United States condemns this senseless war, which puts Putin on the wrong side of history.

The United States reaffirms its unwavering support for Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, extending to its territorial waters.

Let me also be very clear – as President Biden has said – neither the United States nor NATO has any desire or intention for conflict with Russia. Russia is not under threat from the United States or NATO.

Further, we think provocative rhetoric regarding nuclear weapons is reckless, adds to the risk of miscalculation, and should be avoided. We will not indulge in it.

As my delegation noted yesterday, we are assessing President Putin’s directive regarding the Russian Federation’s nuclear posture and at this time see no reason to change our own alert levels.

Russia and the United States affirmed less than a year ago that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. This was also affirmed earlier this year in concert with our P5 partners, noting that nuclear use would have far-reaching consequences.

The United States stands by that statement and will continue to support dialogue and negotiations to reduce nuclear risks, including through verifiable agreements to limit nuclear weapons. A situation like this is exactly why practical work to promote security, nonproliferation, and disarmament is critical. Why the Conference on Disarmament exists.

But we need more than just discussion. We need tangible action like risk reduction, crisis management, and effective verification measures that can reduce dangerous miscalculations and misunderstandings. It can also make the international community safer, a point we have made many times before.

Many have asked what this premeditated, unprovoked, and unjustified attack against Ukraine – in violation of the UN Charter – means for disarmament cooperation. Let us be clear that Russia’s aggression against Ukraine is in fact a repudiation of such cooperation, a fundamental purpose of which is to avoid situations like we face now in Europe.

Regarding Russian spurious and unsubstantiated comments on Ukraine’s nuclear ambitions, let me recall that Ukraine willingly gave up its Soviet-era nuclear weapons and joined the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as a Non-Nuclear Weapon State.  In so doing, Ukraine relied on security assurances provided by the United States, United Kingdom, and the Russian Federation in the Budapest Memorandum.

Ukraine has fully cooperated with the IAEA in implementation of its comprehensive safeguards agreement and Additional Protocol, which enabled the IAEA to conclude that all nuclear material in Ukraine remained in peaceful use. The baseless accusation that Ukraine is now seeking nuclear weapons is just another blatant lie that Putin uses to justify his premeditated and unprovoked invasion of a neighboring country.

Over the past three decades, Russia has invaded two neighboring countries – Ukraine and Georgia – and has failed to abide by its commitments to withdraw forces and munitions from Moldova. Russia has interfered in foreign elections, used chemical weapons to attempt assassinations both abroad and on its own soil, violated international arms control agreements and commitments, and has increasingly demonstrated obstructionist behavior in multilateral fora – including here in the Conference on Disarmament as was so clearly demonstrated today and more recently in hijacking our preparations for the United Nations Open Ended Working Group on Reducing Space Threats.

As President Biden has said, now is the time for the leaders of the world to speak out clearly against President Putin’s aggression -- aggression that was undertaken, and we should also note, with the support of Belarus.

Lukashenka’s continued support for Russia’s unprovoked war against Ukraine is deeply concerning as is the removal of Belarus’ constitutional commitment to remain neutral and nuclear weapon-free. It will make Belarus even more subservient to Russia.  Any movement of Russian nuclear weapons into Belarus would be dangerously provocative and further destabilize the region.  We call on Belarus to reject Russia’s policies of nuclear threat and intimidation.

This is not a moment for hedging to see what happens next. It is already clear what is happening.

The world is watching to see which nations stand up for the principles of sovereignty, political independence, peaceful resolution of disputes, and territorial integrity; and who stands by or tacitly supports Russia.

President Biden said in his State of the Union Address on March 1st that Putin sought to shake the foundations of the free world - thinking he could make it bend to his menacing ways. But he badly miscalculated. He thought he could roll into Ukraine and the world would roll over. Instead, he met a wall of strength he never imagined. He met the Ukrainian people.

From President Zelenskyy to every Ukrainian, their fearlessness, their courage, their determination, inspires the world. Groups of citizens blocking tanks with their bodies. Everyone from students to retirees and teachers turned soldiers defending their homeland. In this struggle as President Zelenskyy said in his speech to the European Parliament “Light will win over darkness.”

Thank you, Madame President, for allowing me to take the floor.