CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT

STATEMENT BY THE UNITED KINGDOM

The Rt. Hon. Lord Ahmad, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister of State
Geneva, 25th February 2020

Introduction
Thank you Mr President.

I congratulate you on your appointment and I assure you of the UK’s cooperation and support.

2020 marks an important year for arms control.

The 50th anniversary of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty – the NPT – and its Review Conference in May, are important moments to reflect on what we have achieved together through the Treaty.

Much has changed since 1970, but the core principles of the Treaty’s three pillars have endured. We believe it has been, and continues to be, a great success.

NPT successes
The NPT has severely curtailed the spread of nuclear weapons; it continues to provide the only credible framework for reducing the numbers of stockpiled weapons, and for achieving complete nuclear disarmament.

And it has enabled many States across the world to benefit from the peaceful uses of nuclear energy: not just for electricity generation - which we believe is crucial to achieving global carbon neutrality, and protecting the planet from the worst impacts of climate change – but also for medical, agricultural, environmental and other uses.

Challenges
These achievements over the NPT’s first half century are encouraging, but it is clear there is so much more still to do.
States such as Iran and North Korea continue to pose proliferation concerns. These must be addressed, which is why the UK is working intensively with partners to persuade Iran to return to compliance with the landmark nuclear deal, the JCPoA.

Furthermore, despite the dismantlement of huge arsenals of warheads, I totally recognise that some States feel the pace of nuclear disarmament is still slower than many would like to see.

**UK approach**
The UK position on this issue is one of pragmatism. We remain committed to the multilateral, step-by-step approach to disarmament, as the security situation allows, and we have a strong track-record on disarmament.
We have reduced our warhead stockpile to the minimum level consistent with the maintenance of a credible deterrent. We have a voluntary moratorium on nuclear testing and the production of fissile material, and for over twenty years, our nuclear weapons have been de-targeted.

We also offer the assurance that the UK will not use, or threaten to use, nuclear weapons against any Non-Nuclear Weapons State party to the NPT that is in compliance with its non-proliferation obligations.

This has all been possible thanks to the framework of the NPT, which we believe remains essential to a safe, prosperous and peaceful world.

Against this background, and the value we attach to the Treaty, the UK is working hard for a successful Review Conference:

- We will of course table a National Report on our implementation of the NPT since the last Conference. We have already made the draft report public.

- We continue to play a leading role on nuclear disarmament verification. This is an incredibly complex area, but developing effective measures for verifying that nuclear disarmament has occurred will be vital for achieving our goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

- And as chair of the P5 process we have enhanced transparency and dialogue between Nuclear and Non-Nuclear Weapon States, and with civil society. Under UK leadership, the P5 have been intensifying their talks with one another.

The UK hosted a P5 Directors-General Conference in London on 12-13 February. Discussions covered all three pillars of the NPT, and included improving transparency, and P5 cooperation on a range of initiatives.
The P5 spoke in depth about disarmament initiatives including our nuclear doctrines, risk reduction and a glossary of nuclear terms.

In light of our focus on transparency, the Conference included a day for civil society and think-tanks to engage with P5 officials and discuss these important issues.

We are particularly grateful to China, France, Russia and the United States for their continued engagement with this process.

I hope all NPT State Parties approach the coming milestones with a shared determination to build on what we have achieved together, and to reinforce the NPT as a central pillar of the rules based international system.

There are three areas in particular that require our attention.

**Disarmament**

The first is this Conference. We must all recognise that the Conference on Disarmament has been blocked for far too long.

Our Presidency proposal last year was to break the deadlock by establishing new Subsidiary Bodies to deepen understanding and eventually prepare the ground for negotiating mandates. We believe this could still form the basis of a Programme of Work in the near future. We therefore hope that the package put forward by you Mr President can be adopted later this week.

In the meantime, we remain committed to the step-by-step approach to multilateral disarmament. That is why we continue to call for universal membership of the NPT, the early entry into force of a Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, and negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty in the Conference of Disarmament.

The UK is committed and ready to start negotiating a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty at this Conference. As a sign of our commitment, we have held a voluntary moratorium on our production of fissile material for over twenty years; and we call on all nuclear possessor states that have not already done so to do the same.

**Space**

The second is to define responsible behaviours in space, to avoid miscalculations and mitigate threats.

Those threats to our space systems are increasing on and from the earth, as well as in space itself. Nations have placed weapons in space, and are developing ever more powerful ones on the ground.
We must build trust and transparency between space-faring nations to reduce the risk of misunderstandings, miscalculations and accidents.

We want to work with all nations to begin establishing an international consensus on responsible space behaviours and have reached out in capitals with an invitation for you to engage on this work.

Chemical Weapons
Finally, here in the chamber where our predecessors negotiated the Chemical Weapons Convention, the third priority for our work must be to get rid of those abhorrent weapons once and for all.

In recent years we have seen the prohibition against the use of chemical weapons being challenged: they have killed and maimed men, women and children in the UK, Iraq, Malaysia, and - repeatedly with devastating effect, tragically - in Syria.

At the OPCW Conference of States Parties last November, two new families of Novichok agents were added to the Schedules of the Chemical Weapons Convention, in response to the Chemical Weapons attack, which took place in the beautiful town of Salisbury in the United Kingdom in 2018.

We welcomed this positive action and the clear message it sent: that the international community will not tolerate the use of Chemical Weapons under any circumstances.

This year, State Parties must prioritise an appropriate response to the first report by the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team attributing responsibility for chemical weapons attacks in Syria.

We must continue to uphold and strengthen our conventions and instruments to ensure that they remain both relevant and effective in the face of new threats.

Conclusion
Mr President, to conclude, let me assure everyone that the UK remains a strong supporter of the NPT and committed to multilateral disarmament. We are working hard to achieve a successful outcome at the Review Conference and we will continue to strive for greater transparency, including through the P5 Process.

Mr President, let me once again assure you of my delegation’s and our country’s support.

Thank you.

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