Mr President

First, let me join others who have expressed their appreciation for your efforts, with the rest of the P6, in pursuing your proposal on a Programme of Work. We deeply regret that, once again, we were not able to reach consensus on a way to deepen our work on the substantive agenda of the Conference.

That said, thank you for giving us the opportunity this morning to discuss gender issues as they relate to the work of the CD, and to disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control more broadly. Let me also thank our Secretary-General and Dr Dalaqua for their introductory remarks, and the delegations who have spoken so far for some thought-provoking points.

This is a subject of great importance to the UK, which has long been a champion of gender perspectives across many fora. Most notably, the UK has played a leading role in the UN Security Council to promote the Women, Peace and Security agenda; this year, of course, as others have noted, we mark the 20th anniversary of Resolution 1325.

In that context, we have supported efforts to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in institutions and mechanisms for the resolution of conflict. I am also pleased to announce that the UK is funding UNIDIR’s Gender and Disarmament Programme, which seeks to better integrate gender perspectives into arms control and disarmament in the multilateral space, ensuring that relevant treaties and conventions deliver for all.

Mr President

The UK firmly believes that women must be properly represented in disarmament and arms control discussions, negotiations and processes – their input and involvement is key to developing and delivering sustainable action.
As your non-paper points out, Mr President, we have made some good progress in increasing women’s participation in our work. But, as the distinguished Ambassador of Switzerland said, the quality of that participation is as important as the quantity. I am pleased to say that the three senior officials leading the UK’s preparations for the forthcoming NPT Review Conference in the Foreign Office, Ministry of Defence and energy ministry are all women. Indeed, whenever I take the floor here or in New York on questions of nuclear disarmament, it is on the basis of instructions prepared in London by the desk officer and section head responsible for nuclear disarmament, and signed off by the head or deputy head of department – all of whom are currently women.

Moreover, for fourteen of the last forty years, the supreme decision-making responsibility on the UK’s nuclear weapons has been in the hands of female Prime Ministers. The first of them, Margaret Thatcher, had clear views on nuclear deterrence and disarmament, which were shaped by the experience of war. In a speech in Moscow in March 1987 she said,

“This fact is that nuclear weapons exist and the knowledge of how to make them cannot be erased…. Two world wars showed us… how terrible a war fought even with conventional weapons can be, yet nuclear weapons have deterred not only nuclear war but conventional war in Europe as well. A world without nuclear weapons may be a dream, but you cannot base a sure defence on dreams. Without far greater trust and confidence between East and West than exists at present, a world without nuclear weapons would be less stable and more dangerous for all of us.”

But as you rightly note, there is more to do. During our Presidency of this Conference last year, as you have done, we tried to bring a gender perspective to the appointment of Subsidiary Body Coordinators and Special Coordinators, though we were not able to achieve the gender balance we would have wanted. This serves to underline the importance of increasing the number of senior women in our delegations from which office holders can be appointed.

It is also crucial that we strive for more equal representation in civil society organisations working in the disarmament field, as well as in governments. In that regard, it was especially pleasing that, during the recent P5 Conference in London, 54% of the participants in the civil society segment were women.

To conclude, Mr President, we welcome your timely initiative, and your thought-provoking paper. My delegation is committed to playing its part in making a difference on this important issue.

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