

UK Statement

CD Plenary – 12 May 2021

Thematic session on Nuclear Disarmament Verification

Mr President,

Thank you for organising this week's plenary discussions on agenda item 1, with a particular focus on nuclear disarmament verification, a subject to which the United Kingdom attaches great importance. It is indeed good that this Conference is getting down to detailed discussions on the substantive issues on its agenda.

My thanks also to Mr Osmundsen and Dr Podvig for their presentations yesterday, and for joining us again this morning. Allow me in particular to recognise the leadership the Government of Norway, and Mr Osmundsen personally, have shown over many years in this field, and to congratulate Mr Osmundsen on his nomination to chair the forthcoming UN Group of Government Experts.

Mr President,

As our recent Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy makes clear, the UK remains committed to the long-term goal of a world without nuclear

weapons. We continue to work for the preservation and strengthening of effective arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation measures.

One of the principal ways we do this is through research into nuclear disarmament and arms control verification.

Effective verification is a key enabler of nuclear disarmament. Alongside transparency and irreversibility, it is widely recognised as one of the core principles of disarmament, and it is impossible to imagine effective measures on nuclear disarmament, or indeed a path to a world without nuclear weapons or the maintenance of that state once achieved, that do not involve extremely robust verification regimes.

The unique challenge in the nuclear domain is to provide a very high degree of confidence that disarmament has occurred without releasing proliferative or classified information, particularly nuclear weapon design information. Along with seeking to improve the security environment, working to solve the challenges to effective nuclear disarmament verification is the most important practical effort we can make towards realising our goal of a world without nuclear weapons, under strict and effective international control and with undiminished security for all.

Mr President,

When the UK and Norway initiated the UK-Norway Initiative, or UKNI, on nuclear disarmament verification in 2007, it was the first time a Nuclear Weapon State and a Non-Nuclear Weapon State had worked together to explore the challenges of nuclear weapons arms control and disarmament verification. In 2015, we were joined by Sweden and the United States to form the Quad Verification Partnership, which conducted the first ever multilateral nuclear disarmament verification exercise, known as LETTERPRESS, in October 2017, to explore the practical challenges associated with the monitoring and verification of nuclear weapon declarations. We have also played a key role in the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification, launched in December 2014.

All these initiatives – and others, such as the Franco-German exercise in September 2019 that we heard about earlier – have shown that Non-Nuclear Weapon States have an important role to play in nuclear disarmament verification research and the development of future verification systems. Nuclear disarmament will affect the security of all states and the interdisciplinary nature of verification research means that it does not need to be confined to those states who have established civil or military nuclear programmes. There are lessons to learn from non-nuclear arms control and disarmament verification as well. We therefore encourage Non-Nuclear Weapon States who have yet to do so to get involved.

It is also, of course, vital that all nuclear possessor states engage in this work and support nuclear disarmament verification research, domestically and internationally. Achieving a world without nuclear weapons will require a verification regime in place on the territory of all possessor states, so it is important that all possessor states understand and contribute to how this could be achieved.

Mr President,

The UK participated actively in the 2018-19 UN Group of Government Experts on nuclear disarmament verification. We welcome its consensus report, and in particular its acknowledgement of the essential role of verification at all stages of the disarmament process. The discussions the Group held on ideas to support capacity building internationally, such as a group of scientific and technical experts and a voluntary funding mechanism, were particularly useful; it is important to develop global capacity in this specialist field in a diverse and inclusive manner. The UK was proud to co-sponsor UN General Assembly Resolution 74/50 establishing a new Group of Government Experts in 2021 and 2022, and we look forward to continuing to play a constructive and active role in its discussions.

The UK also continues to research nuclear disarmament and arms control verification nationally, through the programme at the Atomic Weapons Establishment, and internationally, as part of the Quad Partnership, the IPNDV and bilateral programmes with the US and Sweden. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, we are pleased that national and international research has continued, albeit sometimes in an adapted manner. We look forward to sharing more detailed information on progress with the rest of the international community over the course of the next year, both in a national capacity and in conjunction with our partners.

Thank you once again, Mr President, for convening this important discussion.