



United Kingdom
Mission to the
United Nations

**UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY, 76TH SESSION
FIRST COMMITTEE**

THEMATIC DEBATE (CLUSTERS 5-7)

STATEMENT BY THE UNITED KINGDOM

Mr Chair,

Thank you for the opportunity to give a brief statement covering clusters 5-7 of the thematic debate. My delegation will submit full written statements on each of these clusters to be included in the compendium.

2021 has been yet another challenging year for the multilateral disarmament machinery. Ongoing restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic have disrupted the work of vital forums. The UK takes this opportunity to place on record its deep thanks and appreciation for the work of all office-holders, secretariats and implementation support units, technicians, interpreters and others for their superb efforts to keep our work going to the extent possible in these extraordinary circumstances.

The failure to progress on our vital work within the Conference on Disarmament cannot however be blamed on the pandemic. Once again, despite the tireless work of the six Presidencies, who have sought creative proposals to move our work forward, a small number of States has again prevented the Conference from adopting a Programme of Work. We also regret that the Conference was unable to agree to a simple linguistic change to its Rules of Procedure to render them gender neutral.

It was also deeply concerning that the applications of five UN Member States to participate in the work of the Conference as observers were blocked for bilateral, political reasons unconnected with the work of the Conference. The legitimacy of the Conference rests on it being transparent to the rest of the UN membership, and we strongly urge the two States concerned to reconsider their position on this matter in the 2022 session.

As for the UN Disarmament Commission, the UK continues to support the efforts of Australia to get the Commission back to work. The work of the UNDC has been held up by an issue that has no relevance to its work for far too long.

Mr Chair,

In 2021, the UK was pleased to join consensus on the reports of both the Open-Ended Working Group on developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security and the Group of Governmental Experts on advancing responsible state behaviour in cyberspace. These reports added valuable layers of additional understanding to the consensus framework, demonstrating the value of regular institutional dialogue on this topic. We call on all Member States to support the adoption of the GGE report, as they did the OEWG report, to complete this valuable work.

Looking ahead to a new OEWG, we must give ourselves the best possible chance to make progress. Substantive dialogue ensures all views are heard and sets the ground for genuine progress. It should always be our first step. Bringing people together remains our goal.

Mr Chair,

The situation in several regions is cause for concern.

Instability in the Middle East, and beyond, is exacerbated by Iran's systematic non-compliance with its JCPoA commitments. Iran must reverse all measures inconsistent with the agreement and return to full compliance without delay. Eight chemical weapons attacks in Syria have been attributed to the Assad regime by the OPCW and JIM. We urge Syria to meet its obligations. Against this backdrop, the UK continues to support the creation of a Middle East Zone Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction and their means of delivery, on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at by all the countries of the region.

In Asia, the UK remains concerned by repeated launches of ballistic missiles by the DPRK and calls for the complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation of the DPRK. We also encourage India and Pakistan to engage in dialogue given the potential for a nuclear crisis in South Asia.

In Europe, our own region, Russia has undermined peace and security through the use of Novichok nerve agents, in Siberia and Salisbury, and their deployment of a missile system prohibited under the INF Treaty. We support the ongoing US-Russia Strategic Stability Dialogue to start a new era of arms control.

Thank you, Mr Chair.

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