UNITED KINGDOM

STATEMENT

By

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to the
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at the

First Committee

of the 65th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

NEW YORK, 14 OCTOBER 2010

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Thank you Mr Chairman,

Mr. Chairman,

If one of the key tasks of First Committee is to take stock of progress on the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation agenda, then 2010 must be considered a vintage year - following on from ten long years of deadlock, disappointment and missed opportunities.

We all recognise that the road towards our long-term vision of a world without nuclear weapons is a difficult path to tread; that there will be pitfalls and diversions to avoid along the way. But by the same token we should not shy away from recognising progress when it occurs, because these are the steps upon which we must build. Such progress as we have had also shows us where we must focus renewed efforts if we are to achieve our collective goal.

Individually and together the Nuclear Weapon States have shown an unprecedented willingness to take forward and engage upon this agenda. We have seen progress across a number of fronts: including the very welcome US-Russia agreement on a new START, and a number of countries adding their support to a ban on nuclear weapon test explosions by ratifying the CTBT.

Without doubt the key milestone of the last 12 months has been the successful outcome of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference last May under the able chairmanship of Ambassador Libran Cabactulan.

The NPT is the cornerstone of global efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, to promote the safe and secure use of civil nuclear energy and to pursue the goal of a world without nuclear weapons. Success in May was an essential prerequisite for the reinvigoration of the multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation agenda.

But it is worth recalling that success was not an inevitable outcome. Only three previous Review Conferences since 1975 have had any agreed outcome at all. Many in this hall today recall only too well the events surrounding the failure of the 2005 RevCon.

But the 2010 Review Conference not only achieved a consensus outcome, it went further than any previous RevCon by agreeing a 64-point Action Plan - laying the foundation for further work across all 3 pillars by the time of the next Review Conference in 2015. It is for all States
Party to ensure that this work takes place. The 2010 Review Conference demonstrated what can be achieved through shared endeavour and shared responsibility.

At the 24 September High Level Meeting called by the UN Secretary General, France announced that it will host a conference of the P5 in Paris in 2011. This will build on the P5 conference on “Confidence Building Measures Towards Nuclear Disarmament” held last year in London, and demonstrates an unprecedented degree of cooperation between the P5 in engaging on the recommendations under the Review Conference Final Document. The United Kingdom looks forward to active engagement with our P5 colleagues, but we also look to other States Party of the NPT to demonstrate a similar level of commitment to meet the obligations that they have signed up to under the RevCon Action Plans.

In this context it is highly encouraging that the NPT Review Conference outcome recognised that comprehensive safeguards agreements and the additional protocol are essential for the IAEA to carry out its international safeguards responsibilities, and that they represent the enhanced standard for verification of the NPT. We commend and support in full the action encouraging all State Parties to conclude and bring into force additional protocols.

Mr Chairman,

Another important outcome of the NPT Review Conference was the decision on the Middle East Zone Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction and the proposal to hold a regional conference in 2012. The UK has long supported the establishment of such a zone whilst recognising that its realisation lies in progress towards a comprehensive peace in the Middle East and the need for regional efforts or efforts by the states themselves to create the conditions under which everyone will feel comfortable coming to the table. I can assure you, Mr Chairman, that as an NPT Depository State, the UK will play a full and active role in this regard.

Beyond the collectively agreed action, the United Kingdom has demonstrated its resolve to make progress on multilateral disarmament and take tangible steps towards a safer and more stable world where the UK and others are able to relinquish their nuclear weapons. That is why, just a few days after the arrival of a new coalition Government, we made two formal announcements – on the maximum number of nuclear warheads in the UK’s stockpile, and a review into our nuclear declaratory policy.
These initiatives aim to build trust between nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states and set high standards for others to follow. In a similar vein, the UK is continuing our work with Norway as a leading Non-Nuclear Weapon State to develop and test ways to meet the practical challenge of verifying nuclear disarmament.

As the United Kingdom Minister announced at the recent High Level meeting, this December Norwegian experts will carry out a trial inspection in the UK. The aim of the exercise is to test possible confidence building measures during an inspection, which will provide international inspectors access to sensitive sites without jeopardising national security. This will build on our earlier work with Norway on verifying the dismantlement of nuclear warheads which we presented jointly to the NPT Review Conference in May.

I need not remind colleagues here that such co-operation between a nuclear weapon state and a non-nuclear weapon state while both protecting our NPT obligations is unprecedented, but it underlines the United Kingdom’s belief that increasing transparency, and developing the technical, military and political solutions to the practical challenges of disarmament, are vital to making tangible progress towards our ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

Mr Chairman,

As announced during the NPT Review Conference, the UK is in the final stages of a major Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR). The SDSR will be based on a new National Security Strategy (NSS). This strategy will define the UK’s national interest in pursuit of our prosperity and security, assess the risks to our security and will prioritise and direct our response to those risks, with implications for our organisation and capabilities across government. As part of this review, we have also re-examined the UK’s nuclear declaratory policy. We expect this review to conclude very shortly and we will endeavour to share the results during the final stages of First Committee.

Mr. Chairman,

The success of the 2010 NPT Review Conference only serves to highlight the notable lack of progress in other parts of the Arms Control and Disarmament architecture. It throws into sharp relief that the spirit of collective endeavour and collective responsibility is not shared across the world community.
As the discussion at the High Level Meeting on 24 September amply demonstrated, a range of senior politicians from across the world representing a wide variety of regions and groupings are increasingly concerned at the failure of the Conference on Disarmament to begin work towards a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT).

Concerns about what a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty might mean for individual countries are understandable: each country must consider how international measures affect its interests; but blocking the work of the world’s only permanent negotiating forum for disarmament issues is less understandable.

As we can observe from the 63 Resolutions before this committee, there is much work to be done in multilateral arms control and disarmament, both inside the NPT framework and outside it, and a wide number of issues to be discussed. We therefore urge the remaining State yet to join consensus on starting FMCT negotiations to do so in 2011 and allow the Conference to get down to work.

Mr Chairman,

Throughout 2010, the UK has played a leading role in the area of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. The outcome of the 2010 NPT Review Conference has given us all a map to help us move forward. We will now work, with our international partners, to capitalise on these achievements and to translate these commitments into concrete action in the years ahead.

Thank you Mr. Chairman