THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

STATEMENT ON DISARMAMENT MACHINERY

By

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to the
68th UNGA First Committee

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The UK aligns itself with the statement made in this cluster on behalf of the EU and its member states.

Mr Chairman,

The UN’s First Special Session on Disarmament in 1978 created the UN’s disarmament machinery and established the linkages between the UN General Assembly – through this First Committee, the UN Disarmament Commission, and the Conference on Disarmament.

We firmly believe that all three fora require urgent revitalisation if the disarmament machinery is to be fully effective and relevant to the challenges of the 21st Century.

The Disarmament Commission is unfocused – with just two agenda items: Nuclear Weapons and Conventional Weapons. It does not consider follow up to resolutions passed in First Committee, or emerging threats to international peace and security.

This in turn means that too much of the First Committee’s time is spent voting on resolutions that are often outdated and increasingly irrelevant. Some have not changed in 30 years.

Regrettably, the Conference on Disarmament has failed to agree a programme of work since 1996. The patience of the international community is running thin.

For all the frustrations with the Conference on Disarmament, though, it is difficult to envisage an alternative forum that would do the job better. Nuclear weapons are intimately tied up with the security perceptions of so many states, whether they possess nuclear weapons or not. Any forum for negotiating measures to advance global disarmament must therefore be a multilateral one, and must take decisions by consensus.
This is not to say that other fora cannot make positive contributions where they complement the work of the CD and support the NPT. We hope that the Group of Government Experts on the FMCT will make a significant contribution to this end.

But the Conference on Disarmament is at the heart of our multilateral approach to these issues, and we should all do all that we can to ensure it regains its relevancy.

That is why we supported the establishment of an Informal Working Group to examine the elements needed for a consensus Programme of Work. It is also why we support a revitalisation of the CD's working methods, and an expansion of its membership.

We call again on all members of the Conference on Disarmament to engage in a constructive manner across the various regional and other groups. We need to make a concerted effort to build an understanding on the key issues, including making progress towards a verifiable and internationally acceptable FMCT negotiated on the basis of CD document 1299 and the mandate contained therein.

Mr Chairman

The Machinery was envisioned as a joined-up process, consisting of three separate but mutually complementary bodies dealing with “questions of disarmament” and related international security issues.

Over the years however, these linkages have become, at best, weakened, and at worst, broken. Any serious attempt to revitalise the Disarmament Machinery should start by re-establishing the links and complementarity between its component bodies.
At First Committee, the traditional work would continue. It would negotiate and vote on the resolutions, including consideration of the work of the Conference on Disarmament - through its report - and of the Disarmament Commission.

In this way, after time, the resolutions would become more relevant and focused, on the basis that they would build the agenda for the Conference on Disarmament.

The Conference on Disarmament can play an important role in re-establishing the links in the disarmament machinery, as well as working on its own revitalisation,

It could devote time during its first session to consider the resolutions passed at First Committee. The Conference could be used to deliberate the substance of the resolutions in an attempt to find common ground and cause to move towards negotiations.

Mr Chairman,

We should not forget that it is within the framework of the disarmament machinery established by the First Special Session on Disarmament, and the NPT, that we are committed to taking forward multilateral negotiations on steps to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons. We need the disarmament machinery to function.