THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND

GENERAL STATEMENT

2017 Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review
Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of
Nuclear Weapons

Vienna, 2-12 May 2017
Mr Chairman,

The UK fully aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the EU. I would now like to make some remarks in my national capacity. I must first point out that the UK will hold a General Election on 8 June. Candidates in that election have a range of views. The statement I am about to make sets out the long-standing British government view on the NPT.

Firstly may I congratulate you on your appointment as Chairman. I can assure you of the United Kingdom delegation’s full support for your efforts to achieve a positive start to the 2020 NPT Review process. We hope the nomination and appointment of the remaining chairs of the Review process will follow quickly, and see this as a factor that will facilitate the process in the coming years.

The Non Proliferation Treaty is vitally important for the UK and for the international community as a whole. The NPT has played an unparalleled role in curtailing the nuclear arms race and it continues to play a role in keeping the world safe. It is at the centre of international efforts to stop the spread of nuclear weapons, to create a nuclear weapon free world, and to enable access to the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

We remain committed to strengthening each of the NPT’s mutually reinforcing pillars—non-proliferation, disarmament, and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. These are complementary goals and should be pursued together, systematically and with equal determination across all three pillars by all states parties. The consensus action plan for the 2010 RevCon was unprecedented and a result of the strengthened review process adopted in 1995. We support the fullest implementation of all action plan recommendations and we call on all States Parties to continue working towards that end.

This Review Cycle provides an opportunity for us to collectively reaffirm our commitment to the primacy of the NPT as the cornerstone of the international nuclear non proliferation regime and the essential
foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament and for peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

The NPT continues to make a significant contribution to the strategic stability that the international community requires. We must uphold and strengthen the NPT because of, not despite, the complex security challenges that we all face. It remains the right framework for progress across all three, mutually reinforcing, pillars, including disarmament.

As called on in UNSCR 1887, the United Kingdom continues to urge non-NPT states to ratify the NPT as non-nuclear weapon states. We continue to work to bring those states closer to the international non-proliferation mainstream.

The UK has consistently been at the forefront of international efforts to tackle proliferation. We must work together to ensure that all States Party fulfil their non-proliferation obligations.

The UK condemns in the strongest possible terms the DPRK’s continued development of its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes in direct violation of UNSCRs 1718, 1874, 2087, 2270 and 2321. We urge the DPRK to refrain from any actions that may violate UNSCRs, posing a threat to regional peace and stability, and to abandon its existing nuclear existing programme in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner. The DPRK should instead re-engage with the international community, and take credible, concrete steps to prioritise the well-being of its own people instead of its illegal programmes.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is an important contribution to the non-proliferation regime. The UK remains absolutely committed to its full and robust implementation, and we welcome the latest report from the IAEA confirming Iran is in compliance with its nuclear-related commitments.

The UK supports a universal, strengthened safeguards system and the evolution of safeguards implementation to a State level concept. As part of our commitment to the NPT, the UK also supports the principle and
establishment of Nuclear Weapons Free Zones, in order to strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime and enhance regional and international security.

We reaffirm our commitment to the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East, and to the establishment of a zone in the Middle East free of nuclear and all other weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems. We remain prepared to actively support and facilitate renewed regional dialogue aimed at bridging the differing views in the region on arrangements for a conference. We are encouraging the regional states to consider what practical steps they might take to build confidence and promote an inclusive, balanced, and results oriented engagement.

The UK has a strong record on disarmament - we have reduced our own nuclear forces by over half from their Cold War peak in the late 1970s. Of the recognised nuclear weapons states, we possess only approximately 1% of the total global stockpile of nuclear weapons. The United Kingdom remains firmly committed to step-by-step disarmament, and our obligations under Article Six. We announced in January 2015 that we have reduced the number of warheads on each of our deployed ballistic missile submarines from 48 to 40, and the number of operational missiles on each of those submarines to no more than eight. This takes our total number of operationally available warheads to no more than 120.

This Government remains committed to reducing the UK stockpile of nuclear weapons to no more than 180 warheads by the mid-2020s as set out in the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review.

Mr Chairman

Productive results on nuclear disarmament can only be achieved through a consensus-based approach that takes account of the global security context. Negotiating an international ban on nuclear weapons will not bring us closer to the goal of a world without nuclear weapons.
A ban will not improve the international security environment or increase trust and transparency. Nor will it address the technical and procedural challenges of nuclear disarmament verification. Pursuing a consensus-based step-by-step approach to multilateral disarmament through building necessary mutual trust between states, and through putting into place the key international architecture to help build the conditions for further disarmament, offers the most realistic and effective route towards our shared goal of a world without nuclear weapons. This goal is one of the fundamental aims of the NPT. Any initiative which sets up an alternative process risks undermining or weakening the NPT, and impacting negatively on international peace and security.

Mr Chairman

The UK recognises that global energy demand is increasing. The world seeks ever more energy, reliably and sustainably, and looks to nuclear technology to play an increasing role in securing better quality and duration of life for so many more people. In consequence, the role of the NPT – to help the world take advantage of what nuclear technologies have to offer in a safe, secure, safeguarded and sustainable way – becomes ever more important. The United Kingdom is fully committed to the NPT and looks to the future as a committed global partner in the field of peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

Mr Chairman

As a responsible Nuclear Weapons State the UK is committed to the long-term goal of a world without nuclear weapons, and we believe that the NPT offers the right framework to achieve this. We recognise our obligations under all three of the pillars of the NPT, and will continue to work with our international partners to tackle proliferation, to make progress on multilateral disarmament, and to encourage the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

Thank you, Mr Chairman