THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

STATEMENT ON PILLAR I

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

Vienna, 2-12 May 2017
Pillar I

Statement by the United Kingdom

Mr Chairman,

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 view on nuclear disarmament.

Mr Chairman,

The unpredictable international security environment we face today demands the maintenance of our nuclear deterrent for the foreseeable future. Other states might use their nuclear capability to threaten us, try to constrain our decision making in a crisis and there is a risk of further proliferation of nuclear weapons. The threats from nuclear capable states are very real and we must convince any potential aggressor that the benefits of an attack are far outweighed by their consequences.

Recent changes in the international security context remind us that we cannot rule out further shifts which would put us, or our NATO allies, under grave threat. In the past few years there has been a disturbing increase in both Russian rhetoric about the use of nuclear weapons and the frequency of snap nuclear exercises.

There is the threat from countries that are actively seeking to acquire nuclear capabilities illegally. North Korea has stated a clear intent to develop and field a nuclear weapon, and it continues to work towards that goal, in flagrant violation of a series of United Nations Security Council resolutions.

And there is the question of further proliferation, leading to new nuclear threats emerging in the future. The Parliamentary debate in July 2016 on
whether to maintain our nuclear deterrent covered not just the threats we face today, but an assessment of what the world could be like over the coming decades.

Maintaining our independent nuclear deterrent is not just essential for our own national security, it is one of our most important contributions to the future security of our NATO allies. As long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance. Abandoning our nuclear deterrent unilaterally would undermine our security and that of our allies. It would not make us safer.

Mr Chairman,

Last year, UK Parliament voted, by a decisive margin, to replace the four submarines necessary to ‘maintain the current posture’ of continuous-at-sea deterrence. This is not an upgrade of our capabilities. Nor does it change the salience of nuclear weapons in our security doctrine. We would employ our nuclear weapons only in extreme circumstances of self-defence, including the defence of our NATO Allies.

And we continue to offer the assurance that the UK will not use, or threaten to use, nuclear weapons against any Non-Nuclear Weapons State party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. This assurance does not apply to any state in material breach of those non-proliferation obligations and, while there is currently no direct threat to the UK or its vital interests from states developing weapons of mass destruction, such as chemical and biological capabilities, we reserve the right to review this assurance if the future threat, development or proliferation of these weapons make it necessary.

As a responsible Nuclear Weapons State the UK is committed to creating the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons, in line with our obligations under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. We play a leading role on disarmament verification. We continue to press for key steps towards
multilateral disarmament, including the entry into force of the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty and for successful negotiations in the CD on a fissile material cut-off treaty. And, in our shared effort to strengthen international peace and security and to address further prospects for nuclear disarmament, we will continue to work to build trust and confidence amongst the P5.

Looking to the future, we are committed to retaining only the minimum amount of destructive power needed to deter any aggressor. In 2010, we provided an update on the total size of our nuclear warhead stockpile. In January 2015, we delivered on our Strategic Defence and Security Review 2010 commitment to reduce the number of deployed warheads on each SSBN from 48 to 40. We also announced that we have reduced the number of operationally available warheads to no more than 120 and we remain committed to further reduce our overall nuclear weapon stockpile to no more than 180 warheads by the middle of the next decade.

Our Negative Security Assurances regarding the use and threat of use of nuclear weapons, our commitment to maintain only the minimal credible deterrent, and our transparency about our arsenal and declaratory policy all contribute to the UK being a responsible NWS. There are other factors, too:

- The UK maintains a minimum credible level of deterrence, with a single Trident submarine on patrol, normally on several days 'notice to fire'. For over twenty years, UK nuclear weapons have been de-targeted;

- We have had a voluntary moratorium on the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons or other explosive nuclear devices since 1995, and have declared the amount of fissile material produced prior to the onset of that moratorium;

- We are a strong supporter of Nuclear Weapon Free Zones, which enhance regional and international security;
• We have strict accountancy and control measures for military nuclear material which are based on UK legislation and industry best practice and take our responsibilities for protecting our military nuclear material very seriously.

• And we have a well-established and on-going programme of activity to protect defence networks and the information they hold from cyber attack.

We remain determined to continue to work with partners across the international community to prevent proliferation, to make progress on multilateral nuclear disarmament, to build trust and confidence between states, and to take tangible steps toward a safer and more stable world in which countries with nuclear weapons feel able to relinquish them.

Thank you, Mr Chairman