



**United Nations General Assembly  
First Committee  
63<sup>rd</sup> Session  
New York**

**Statement by**

**H.E. John Duncan  
Ambassador for Arms Control and Disarmament**

**on behalf of the United Kingdom**

**“Nuclear Cluster”**

**New York, Thursday 16 October 2008**

Mr Chairman, distinguished colleagues,

1. The United Kingdom associates itself fully with the statement delivered by France on behalf of the European Union. We welcome the opportunity that the First Committee gives States to explore areas of consensus on global security for the international community to take forward, particularly in the field of disarmament.
2. The UK is committed to strengthening the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, with the aim of working towards a safer world without nuclear weapons, our ultimate goal. We stand by our unequivocal undertaking to accomplish their total elimination. This requires balanced implementation of all three pillars of the NPT and all parties to live up to the letter and spirit of their respective commitments.
3. We support the disarmament obligations set out in article VI of the NPT, and have an excellent record in meeting these commitments. We are fully committed to the decisions and Final Document of the 1995 and 2000 Review Conferences of the Parties to the NPT, including the relevant disarmament measures. And we are committed to the implementation of the 1995 NPT Review Conference resolution on the Middle East.
4. Since the end of the Cold War, the UK has made substantial progress towards implementing our nuclear disarmament obligations. Firstly, on infrastructure and platforms, we have withdrawn and dismantled our maritime tactical nuclear capability, withdrawn and dismantled the RAF's WE177 nuclear bomb and terminated the nuclear Lance missile and artillery roles that we undertook with the United States of America under dual-key arrangements. Consequently, the United Kingdom is the only nuclear-weapon State recognised under the NPT which has reduced its deterrent capability to a single nuclear-weapon system.
5. Secondly, we have made deep cuts in the size of our nuclear arsenal, retaining only a minimum deterrent. The number of operationally available warheads has recently been cut further to fewer than 160, part of a reduction of the total explosive power of our nuclear forces of more than 75% in the past two decades. UK nuclear weapons account for a small fraction of the global inventory.
6. We have also significantly reduced the readiness of our remaining weapons. Normally, only one Trident submarine is on deterrent patrol at any one time. That submarine is at several days' "notice to fire". Its missiles are not targeted at any country. UK nuclear weapons are not on high alert, nor are they on "launch on warning" status.
7. We do not believe that the circumstances currently exist for the UK safely to choose now to *unilaterally* renounce our nuclear weapons. We have therefore taken the steps necessary to maintain a minimum deterrent beyond the life of the current submarines. This does not mean that we have taken an irreversible decision that commits us irrevocably to possessing nuclear weapons in 40 or 50 years' time.

Mr Chairman,

8. We continue to explore further opportunities to complement the disarmament measures taken to date, where national security and non-proliferation constraints allow us. Since June 2007 the UK has been undertaking innovative work to address some of the technical challenges posed by disarmament. We have tasked the UK's Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) with some detailed work on key stages in the verification of the reduction and elimination of nuclear weapons, including the authentication of warheads, chain of custody problems in sensitive nuclear weapons facilities and monitored storage of dismantled nuclear weapons. AWE has also participated in trilateral work with Norway and the verification NGO, "VERTIC", on managed access to sensitive nuclear facilities and the authentication of nuclear warheads.
9. The UK was pleased to support a major study published last month by the independent International Institute of Strategic Studies on the conditions required for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Their report is a thoughtful, detailed and constructive contribution to our debates. We

are pleased that the authors came to New York on Tuesday to present their findings in the margins of this Committee.

10. The UK is also discussing with P5 partners plans to host a P5 conference next year, as proposed by our former Defence Secretary Des Browne in Geneva earlier this year. Our aim is to build mutual confidence on issues associated with nuclear disarmament, including the technical challenges to verification.
11. The UK has adopted a transparent approach to disarmament wherever possible. We produced historical records of our defence holdings of both plutonium and highly enriched uranium. We ceased production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons in 1995. All excess fissile material stocks declared as surplus to defence requirements have been placed under international safeguards and we no longer exercise our right as a nuclear-weapon State to withdraw from such stocks for use in nuclear weapons. We have not conducted a test nuclear explosion since 1991 and we ratified the CTBT in 1998.
12. The UK welcomes the bilateral agreements which have greatly reduced the major nuclear arsenals since the end of the Cold War, and looks forward to further progress. It is clear to us that considerable bilateral progress will have to be made in reducing the large nuclear arsenals before it will be helpful and useful to include the small fraction of the global stockpile that belongs to us.
13. We welcome the announcement earlier this year that the US and Russia will work towards a legally binding successor to the START Treaty and as the countries with the greatest stockpiles of weapons, we continue to encourage the US and Russia to go even further with their reductions.

Mr Chairman,

14. In signing the Non-Proliferation Treaty, all States assume a responsibility to create the kind of security environment in which we can achieve a world free from nuclear weapons. That means sending a strong, united and unequivocal message that the international community will not tolerate nuclear proliferation.
15. Let's be very clear. Non-proliferation and disarmament are not in competition. The road to a world free from nuclear weapons does not lie through new nuclear-armed states. It does not lie through the flouting of UN Security Council Resolutions requiring compliance with nuclear non-proliferation norms. And it does not lie through anything other than the highest standards of nuclear safety and security and the scrupulous implementation of the appropriate safeguards.
16. There is no alternative. The emergence of a new nuclear-armed state or states would bring back the spectre of a nuclear arms race. It would de-stabilise the region concerned. And it would put nuclear disarmament back for a generation. It is vital that we work together to strengthen the NPT by responding with vigour to proliferation challenges and by strengthening the international and regional verification regimes. The IAEA must have the tools and authority it needs to detect clandestine nuclear activities and properly to address non compliance cases
17. The UK reiterates its call for all IAEA member states that have not yet done so to sign and implement Comprehensive Safeguards Agreements. We firmly believe that the Additional Protocol is the minimum required standard for the IAEA to uphold confidence that the development of nuclear energy threatens no one's security.
18. Collectively we must do all we can to ensure that nuclear weapons and fissile material cannot fall into hands of terrorists and criminals. The UK, both nationally and through the European Union, makes a major contribution to the Global Partnership against the spread of weapons and materials of mass destruction and to the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1540. We warmly welcome the expansion of the Global Partnership announced at the Tokyo Summit and the extended and strengthened mandate of the United Nations 1540 Committee under Security Council Resolution 1810. We will continue to play a leading role in both these key areas. The UK also restates its commitment to the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism and the Proliferation Security Initiative and urges those countries that have not yet done so to join the many states that have already come together to support them.

19. There is more that we can all do now to cement an inevitably downward trend in the numbers of weapons in the world. The next logical step for nuclear disarmament is a global cap on the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons and explosive devices. It would mean that, for the first time since the nuclear age began over sixty years ago, there would be a ceiling on the amount of fissile material available for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. It is impossible to imagine the ultimate achievement of nuclear disarmament without the establishment of such a ceiling, a ceiling that can in due course be lowered, eventually to zero.
20. To this end, we continue to press for negotiations to start, without pre-conditions, on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty at the Conference on Disarmament. We call on all members of the CD to agree swiftly to the proposed programme of work, CD1840, and allow the Conference to get back to the work it was designed to do.
21. We should also put in place a ban on further explosive testing of nuclear weapons. We welcome the increase in the number of States Parties to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and urge all States that have not yet done so to sign and ratify it as soon as possible.
22. As we continue to work towards nuclear disarmament, the UK understands and respects the desire of the non-nuclear-weapon States to receive multilateral guarantees from the nuclear-weapon States that they will not be threatened or attacked with nuclear weapons. In this regard, we remain committed to the negative and positive security assurances we have given to non-nuclear-weapon States in our letter to the UN Secretary-General in 1995, subsequently noted in Security Council resolution 984 (1995).
23. The UK believes that the best way of achieving the guarantees sought by the non-nuclear-weapon States is through the protocols annexed to treaties creating nuclear-weapon-free zones. The Nuclear Weapon-Free Zones can build stability and support the wider international objectives of preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons. This process has already achieved a track record of significant results. The UK has given security assurances in association with the treaties of Tlatelolco, Rarotonga and Pelindaba and has, through ratification of the relevant protocols, granted treaty-based negative security assurances to nearly 100 countries. We hope that the Treaty of Pelindaba will come into fruition soon and encourage those African States that have not yet ratified to do so.

Mr Chairman,

24. We are strongly committed to our nuclear disarmament obligations under article VI of the NPT. We have outlined the substantial progress made to this end, and the new areas we are exploring on a technical level as well as to foster increased confidence between Nuclear Weapons States. It is clear however that the achievement of a nuclear weapons free world is something on which nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapons States alike have to work together. We all agree on the long-term vision. It is the responsibility of us all to do all we can to make this vision a reality.