

Conference on Disarmament
Statement to plenary meeting, 12 June 2003
Ambassador David Broucher, United Kingdom

Let me begin by saying that we are glad to see Israel taking up the Presidency of the Conference on Disarmament for the first time. I cannot say I envy you the task of trying to move the CD forward in the difficult matters it has been wrestling with for several years. But I can assure you of my delegation's support in your efforts to make progress and to make better use of the forum that the CD provides.

You have encouraged delegations not to miss the opportunity provided by our plenary meetings to make statements relevant to the issues on our agenda. I would like to take up that invitation today by putting on record in the CD information about work relating to nuclear disarmament that the UK has been carrying out. This may be of interest particularly to those colleagues who were not able to attend the recent second meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the next NPT Review Conference.

The UK has on many occasions expressed its commitment to the ultimate common goal of the global elimination of nuclear weapons. At the 2000 Review Conference of the NPT we identified three areas relevant to nuclear arms control measures and the achievement of this goal. These were: the ability to verify that states are not testing nuclear weapons; that they are not producing fissile material for nuclear weapons; and that they have reduced and dismantled nuclear warheads and disposed properly of the fissile material arising.

The UK is firmly committed to all three of these, the first two through the CTBT and an FMCT. Although sadly neither of these will come into force in the near future, we assume that the moratorium on testing will continue to be observed, and we urge others to join us in a moratorium on production in order to make it universal.

On the third, the UK has been conducting work on verification of future arrangements to reduce and ultimately eliminate stockpiles of nuclear weapons. The programme has so far focused on the authentication of warheads and their components. The question we have asked ourselves is whether it will be possible to verify the presence of nuclear

warheads at a site without revealing sensitive design information in violation of the NPT. The studies have shown that external detection of fissile material and of warheads is possible. Although close access to the item is often needed, the number of warheads inside containers can be assessed externally. This is good news, since it means that verification is possible. At the same time, care is needed to avoid providing data from which design information could be “reverse-engineered”.

The UK is also considering other aspects of verification. We aim to develop knowledge relevant to the verification of any international arrangement for decommissioning and dismantling nuclear warheads, and disposing of resultant surplus fissile material. The work will continue, and we aim to produce another interim report, which we shall share with CD delegations, in 2004. In the meantime I am asking for the UK’s working paper on this topic to be circulated as an official document of the Conference.

I am conscious that our work on verifying nuclear disarmament is well ahead of progress in the CD. Had we been able to continue the work begun in 1998 on FMCT we might by now have taken that essential next step. It is not for want of effort that we have got stuck, and I would like particularly to pay tribute to the five past presidents for their strenuous work. The UK does not intend to submit any amendments to their proposal. Sadly I do not think it will ever fall to me to take the chair of the CD. But I would like to think that other presidents, past and future, will continue to provide the CD with advice, inspiration and support in the way that Ambassadors Dembri, Vega, Lint, Salander and Reyes have already done.

In the end, Mr President, I am confident that the CD will agree a work programme, indeed for most of us, it has been obvious for many years what this will need to contain. We should not give up the effort to reach consensus simply because it is proving difficult. The key to reaching agreement does not lie here in Geneva, but equally no impetus will be created to reach that agreement unless someone generates it from here. The UK cannot lead this work, but we pledge our support to anyone who can. What we need now is a new process.

Thank you, Mr President.