



**United Kingdom  
Permanent Representation  
to the  
Conference on Disarmament**

# **STATEMENT**

By

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**Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain  
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**Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty**

**Geneva  
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**Check against Delivery**

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### FISSILE MATERIAL CUT-OFF TREATY

Recent statements by the US, Japan and the Netherlands have reiterated their support for the early negotiation of a treaty to ban the production of fissile material for weapons and other explosive devices – a fissile material cut off treaty or FMCT. We have just had an excellent seminar on these issues organised by the Netherlands Mission, and a seminar organised by Japan will take place tomorrow. We have also had a useful paper submitted by South Africa last May (CD1671). In view of these contributions, I judge it opportune to reiterate the views of the UK on an FMCT.

The United Kingdom believes that an FMCT would be a valuable contribution to international security. An FMCT would introduce a worldwide, legally binding and verifiable ban on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices. This would represent a considerable advance on the present situation in which only some states have declared voluntary moratoria on such production, and these are mostly unverified. In addition, an FMCT would make other measures to address stocks of fissile material more meaningful, because the benefit of such measures will always be questionable so long as there is no ban on future production. An FMCT would also be an essential basis for further moves towards global nuclear disarmament, which will never be achieved without first having verification arrangements on fissile material production facilities.

The commitment to negotiate an FMCT in the CD is enshrined in numerous UN resolutions and in the 13 steps set out in the Final Document of the 2000 NPT Review Conference. It has been endorsed at one time or another by the delegations in this room. A mandate exists for the negotiations – the so-called Shannon mandate – and the negotiations did once start briefly in 1998. Since then, there has been no progress. Let me repeat that the UK remains ready and eager to begin negotiations on an FMCT in the CD immediately and without pre-conditions, and we call upon all other members of the CD to join us.

Among other reasons because of the complexity of the subject, we believe that the negotiations should properly be conducted in the CD. All the key players need to be formally involved if an eventual FMCT is to achieve its purposes, and that includes the NNWS, because we shall need to talk about safeguards and the IAEA. It has sometimes been suggested that to get around the current deadline on the CD's work programme we should negotiate in informal plenaries. We do not think this would work, because we shall need the involvement of experts. We are not ready to create a false equivalence with other issues by agreeing to revert to a mere discussion of FMCT. The time for that has passed. Nor do we think we should spend yet more time on trying to obtain negotiating mandates for other subjects before we can go forward with an FMCT. We have a mandate for FMCT negotiations. Let us use it.

As is well known, certain delegations believe that FMCT negotiations would be incomplete if they did not tackle existing stocks. They think that stopping future production without cutting stocks would simply perpetuate the status quo. But work is being taken forward on stocks now. And our view is that if we try and include stocks in an FMCT, this will complicate an otherwise simple issue. Let me explain further.

The UK believes the most effective FMCT would cover the five Nuclear Weapons States and those outside the NPT. Within those states, the stocks vary greatly. Whilst the short-hand of "existing weapons-usable fissile material" (excluding material in weapons and material stockpiled for weapons use) is often used, this covers a significant variation between the states, for example, in the size and nature - in terms of their chemical form, purity and isotopic composition - of their stockpiles.

In addition, as the South African paper noted, the amount of information publicly available about holdings differs, as do the estimated amounts of stocks in existence. There is also a difference in the proportion of stocks each country has outside any form of safeguards or verification, and the extent to which those stocks are the subjects of disposition plans.

Therefore trying to reach an agreement on stocks under an FMCT that would be acceptable to all states would be extremely difficult.

But we are not saying that we should ignore stocks. What we are saying is that there are other approaches for dealing with them that are likely to be more productive than through an FMCT. We note the proposal in the South African paper that material declared excess to military requirements could be transferred irreversibly to peaceful purposes. We can already see examples of this e.g. in Russia and the US, surplus HEU is being blended down to LEU and the Russia-US Plutonium Agreement will, with the help of other states including the UK, dispose of a total of 68 tonnes of plutonium. With respect to civil stocks, the countries subscribing to the Guidelines for the Management of Plutonium publish annual figures about their holdings of unirradiated plutonium. The UK and France also annually publish figures for their civil holdings of HEU in a similar format to that for plutonium. All UK and French civil materials are covered by Euratom safeguards and the UK's safeguards agreement with the IAEA enables the Agency to inspect all such stocks and materials if it so chooses.

In summary, I am saying that we should not complicate an already complex issue. Our focus should be on a straightforward ban on future production. We are more likely to be able to mop the floor effectively if we first shut off the water tap, which for the benefit of American speakers, I had better identify as a faucet. To argue the opposite, that we should not turn off the tap until we are ready to start mopping the floor, makes no sense.

I should like now to respond to Ambassador Inoguchi's call for a moratorium on fissile material production for weapons purposes. The UK declared such a moratorium in 1995 and has produced no fissile material for nuclear weapons since then. There are no plans to change this. Our production facilities are subject to safeguards. I call upon all those

that have not already done so to join us in declaring a moratorium. Ideally, this should be open ended and unconditional, to make the best contribution to an improved international security environment.

The UK is ready to agree today to set up an ad hoc committee to negotiate an FMCT. We do not believe that other issues designated for a CD work programme are similarly advanced to the point of negotiation, but we are ready to support any reasonable formula, such as the Amorim proposal, for agreeing the work programme that can command consensus. We commend the efforts of the 5 Ambassadors and encourage them to continue. We also urge fellow members of the CD not to let the best be the enemy of the good. Before the tide can go out, it first has to turn. An FMCT banning future production would fix the high tide mark of nuclear weapons-usable fissile material and set the stage for further reductions in future.