Please check against delivery
Madam President,
The United Kingdom associates itself with the speech just delivered on behalf of the EU.

As I said last week, the UK remains absolutely committed to the long-term goal of a world without nuclear weapons. We have a strong record of fulfilling our disarmament commitments and of meeting our international legal obligations which flow from our membership of the NPT as a Nuclear Weapons State.

Madam President,

Sometimes people downplay the importance of an FMCT. Let me briefly recall why it is so important.

Obtaining fissile material (i.e. high enriched uranium and plutonium) remains the greatest challenge to any new nuclear weapon programme. For more than 50 years, this recognition has underpinned both support for and opposition to the adoption of a binding international treaty banning the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. Such a treaty, if effectively verified, would put a ceiling on the total amount of fissile material available for weapons and thereby deliver a number of important benefits:

- Turn existing moratoria on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices announced by the US, Russia, UK and France into legally binding commitments;
- Place such a commitment on states that have not announced such a moratorium;
- Ensure verification arrangements were applied, e.g. in the form of IAEA safeguards, to all enrichment and reprocessing facilities in nuclear weapons possessing states and on any fissile material they produced for peaceful purposes;
- In the process put in place an essential building block towards an eventual global ban on nuclear weapons;

Madame President,

I talked last week about the importance of action to accompany words. The United Kingdom has already taken a number of practical steps in relation to fissile material.

- The UK (along with US, Russia and France) has declared a moratorium on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.
- In the past the UK had produced high enriched uranium and plutonium for weapons purposes. However, the UK announced in April 1995 that it had ceased the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices. Accordingly, no such material has been produced since that date, though production of low enriched uranium and separated plutonium for civil purposes has continued.
The UK has produced historical records of all our defence holdings of fissile material and placed stocks surplus to defence requirements under international safeguards. In July 1998 the United Kingdom took the step of declaring the total size of the stocks of nuclear materials that it held outside international safeguards for national security purposes. At the same time we announced that much of this stock was no longer required for defence purposes and that 4.4 tonnes of non-high enriched uranium would be placed under Euratom safeguards and made liable to inspection by the IAEA.

- We have also ceased exercising our right, as a Nuclear Weapon State, to withdraw fissile material from safeguarded stocks for nuclear weapons. Withdrawals are limited to small quantities of materials not suitable for weapons purposes and the details are made public. No material withdrawn from safeguards is used in nuclear weapons.

Madame President

Let me turn now to the current state of play on the FMCT here at the CD. It is not enough for states such as the UK to take unilateral actions on fissile material. We must move forward together.

We believe that sustainable disarmament can only be achieved though a multilateral process. The negotiation of a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty in the CD must remain the priority for the international community if we are to take forward our shared disarmament and non-proliferation agenda, and achieve our shared long-term goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

An FMCT, which should verifiably ban the future production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons and other explosive devices, must include all nuclear players if it is to fulfil the ambition of the international community that it will strengthen the global disarmament and non-proliferation framework in a meaningful way.

With a verifiable treaty in place, we will be a significant step closer to our long-term goal of a world without nuclear weapons. Without an FMCT, we still have no legally binding way of putting a stop to the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons.

We therefore call on all CD members to seek to engage in a constructive manner with their colleagues across the various groupings in an effort to find ways to build an understanding on the key issues and make progress towards a verifiable and internationally acceptable FMCT.

We congratulate Canada on their careful stewardship of the FMCT resolution last October and look forward to engaging within the context of a Group of Governmental Experts. The
UN Secretary-General’s call for views on that resolution is a good opportunity to set out clearly our detailed positions on an FMCT. I hope we will all take that opportunity. More than that, I hope we can soon do more than discuss an FMCT right here in the CD.

Thank you Madam President.