STATEMENT ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS

By

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UK Head of Delegation
to the
67 UNGA First Committee

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Mr Chairman,

In recent years we have seen tangible steps towards the goal of nuclear disarmament, and it is important to mark these successes. But we also need to make a commitment to a shared future where we each are prepared to do our part to build a safer and more stable world; a world where those without nuclear weapons don’t want them, and those who have them no longer feel that they need them. This is of the most fundamental importance, and will be our legacy for the generations who follow.

**UK position**

The UK Government remains absolutely committed to the long term goal of a world without nuclear weapons. We have a strong record on fulfilling our nuclear disarmament commitments and of meeting the international legal obligations which flow from our membership of the NPT as a Nuclear Weapons State.

While nuclear weapons exist, and while the future security environment remains so uncertain, the UK government remains committed to retaining a credible and effective minimum nuclear deterrent, and to do so in a safe and secure manner. At the 2010 Review Conference, we declared for the first time the maximum number of nuclear warheads in the UK stockpile, and announced a re-examination of the UK’s nuclear declaratory policy.

Our 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review concluded that the UK could meet the minimum necessary requirements for credible deterrence with a smaller nuclear weapons capability. We therefore set out a number of new disarmament measures, announcing that we would by the mid 2020s:

- reduce the number of warheads onboard each of our submarines from 48 to 40;
- reduce the requirement for operationally available warheads to no more than 120;
- reduce the number of operational missiles on the Vanguard class submarines to no more than 8; and
- reduce our overall nuclear weapons stockpile to no more than 180.

In June 2011 we announced that the programme for implementing these warhead reductions had commenced early, and that at least one of our submarines now carries a maximum of 40 nuclear warheads. We expect the reduction in operationally available warheads to 120 to take place by the time of the next Review Conference in 2015.

As a result of our declaratory policy review, we also announced in the SDSR a new, stronger security assurance that the UK will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against Non-Nuclear Weapons States Party to, and in compliance with their obligations under, the NPT.

**Multilateral cooperation**

As well as these important unilateral steps, the UK has been working hard to make progress multilaterally.

The P5 Conference in Washington from 27 – 29 June was a vital opportunity for the five nuclear weapon states to focus on concrete progress towards fulfilling our NPT disarmament obligations. As with the previous London and Paris conferences, it was significant not only for the substantive discussions that we had, but for continuing to build trust and confidence between the five NPT nuclear weapon states, and for the public outreach event with NGOs and non-nuclear weapon states.

Our discussions covered the range of disarmament, transparency and confidence-building measures – and we look forward to continuing those discussions in the months and years ahead. The P5 continued their discussions on how to report on their relevant activities, as prescribed by the NPT Action Plan, and considered proposals for a standard reporting form.

The disarmament pillar of the NPT is, of course, primarily about the particular responsibilities of the P5 to work towards the requirements of Article VI. But we must not forget that all Parties to the NPT share responsibility across the three pillars to deliver against the agreed Action Plan - and to report their progress in doing so. The Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative is a great example of countries taking a lead to make cross-pillar progress.

**UK – Norway Initiative**

In this regard, the UK has for a number of years been working with Norway. This initiative – the first of its kind - has seen our two countries carry out ground breaking research into the verification of nuclear warhead dismantlement.
The work was founded on the principle that any future disarmament process would need to be underpinned by a verification regime that can demonstrate, with confidence, that nuclear disarmament has taken place.

Last year we were pleased to host, in partnership with Norway, a technically focused workshop in London to develop this work and to share our progress with delegates from a number of non-nuclear weapon states that had expressed an interest in the research conducted under the initiative.

Our joint work is ongoing and we are looking forward to presenting further updates on our progress at future PrepComs, and the 2015 Review Conference.

In addition to the work that the UK has been doing unilaterally, bilaterally and with the other NWS and NNWS on nuclear disarmament, we continue to press strongly for progress on the key multilateral instruments that will help us to move towards the ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

**CTBT**

The entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty continues to be one of the UK’s key disarmament priorities. We were one of the first countries to sign and ratify the Treaty, and continue to maintain a voluntary moratorium on nuclear test explosions. We welcome and congratulate Indonesia and Guatemala on their ratification during the past year, bringing the treaty closer to universality. In support of this aim, the UK is supporting a project to promote signature and ratification among small island countries and welcomes the Niue’s signature earlier this year.

The UK strongly supports the work of the CTBT Organisation in building up the treaty’s global verification regime.

**Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty**

We urgently want to see the start of negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty. The UK remains firmly committed to an FMCT. With a verifiable treaty in place, we will be a significant step closer to our 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. And yet another year has gone by with the CD still unable to start negotiations or even agree to a Programme of Work. The P5 have been working together on the commitment that we made in Washington to renew efforts to promote negotiations in the CD, and we will continue to do so.

**Non-proliferation challenges**

Whilst the focus often rests upon the disarmament pillar of the NPT Action Plan, and understandably so, there are considerable challenges in non-proliferation that we all need to work together to address if we are going to be able to create a safer and more secure world in which all states are ultimately able to relinquish their nuclear weapons.

Nowhere is the challenge to our collective endeavour and collective responsibility more evident than the threats posed by the nuclear programmes of Iran and the DPRK. The international community continues to have serious concerns about the DPRK’s claimed uranium enrichment programme and light water reactor construction, and about Iran’s expansion of its capacity to produce 20% enriched uranium, for which it has no plausible civilian use. Iran remains consistently at the top of the IAEA’s agenda because of Iran’s long history of trying to conceal their programme.

The international community must be united in its concerns about Iran’s nuclear programme. We in the E3+3 are working tirelessly to try to resolve it — to encourage Iran to engage meaningfully with the international community and take the necessary concrete steps that would re-build international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of their programme. Once this international confidence is restored, we have expressed a readiness to treat Iran’s nuclear programme in the same manner as that of any Non-Nuclear Weapon State Party to the NPT.

**MEWMDFZ**

The British Government continues to support the establishment of a Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone. As one of the co-convenors of the Conference on the MEWMDFZ, mandated by the 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, we are working to bring all regional states together in order to discuss how progress can be made. We remain committed to the mandate and we fully support the facilitator of the Conference, Jaako Laajava of Finland. Mr Laajava has conducted an extensive outreach programme and consulted all states of the region in preparation for the MEWMDFZ Conference. We welcome his ongoing efforts in this regard. The UK is clear
that in order to deliver a constructive conference, the engagement and agreement of all the states of the region will be required. We welcome all efforts to create an atmosphere conducive to dialogue, and acknowledge the serious work which some regional actors are currently undertaking.

**Additional Protocol**

We were very encouraged by the fact that the NPT RevCon final document recognised that IAEA comprehensive safeguards agreements and an Additional Protocol are essential for the IAEA to carry out its international safeguards responsibilities to full effect.

**NWFZ – SEANFWZ and Mongolia**

The UK believes that Nuclear Weapons Free Zones contribute greatly to strengthening the nuclear non-proliferation regime and to enhancing regional and international security.

In December 2011, the P5 and the states of South East Asia, reached agreement on the terms and language for the P5 Protocol to the South East Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone, which will grant treaty based negative security assurances to a further 10 states. We are disappointed that the signing ceremony of the Protocol to the Treaty of Bangkok, which was due to take place on 12 July 2012, was postponed.

P5 States remain strongly committed to signing the Protocol to the Treaty of Bangkok as quickly as possible. By signing and ratifying this Protocol, the P5 agree to respect the Treaty and agree not to use, or threaten to use, nuclear weapons against its 10 States parties. This step will make an important contribution to the global nuclear non-proliferation regime and to regional and international security.

We understand that some ASEAN states may have questions over statements that some of the P5 States planned to issue upon signing or ratifying the Protocol.

Such statements are a standard and permitted part of international practice. They have been employed in relation to the Protocols to the Treaties of Rarotonga and Pelindaba (covering the South Pacific and Africa, respectively) with no adverse impact in practice on the corresponding protocols’ benefits or effectiveness, and no negative reaction by the States parties to those Treaties.

In common with the Protocols to the Treaties of Rarotonga and Pelindaba, there is no prohibition on reservations in the Protocol to the Treaty of Bangkok, to which the P5 States are eligible to become States parties.

The UK also further demonstrated our commitment to strengthening the non-proliferation regime, by signing the P5 declaration on Mongolia’s nuclear weapon free status, last month in New York and continuing to co-sponsor the associated resolution in First Committee.

**Conclusion**

Mr Chairman, I will conclude by reiterating the UK’s commitment to continue to work both with other nuclear weapon states and with non-nuclear weapon states to strengthen the NPT as the cornerstone of the global non-proliferation and disarmament regime. We must all work together to take these essential mutually reinforcing steps, to remove the incentives for proliferation, and move towards our goal of a world without nuclear weapons.