The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Statement to the General Debate

By

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to the

70th UNGA First Committee

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Mr Chairman, since this is the first time I am taking the floor in formal session, let me congratulate you on the assumption of your role and assure you of my delegation's full support. Let me also align myself with the statement made earlier during this debate on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

Mr Chairman, the United Kingdom is proud to have been part of the UN since it began and honoured that the first General Assembly meeting, seventy years ago, was held in London. Seventy years on, in his statement during the high level segment that marked the beginning of this session, the British Foreign Secretary observed that "Britain has always believed that the stability we seek in relations between nations is best realised through the framework of laws, norms and institutions that together constitute the rules-based international system that was developed after the Second World War, with the UN Charter at its heart."

That framework of laws, norms and institutions is as vital to the conduct of the issues dealt with by this Committee as to any other. It has underpinned more than a decade of tough negotiations which concluded this year on 14 July when the United Kingdom, alongside our E3+3 partners, agreed a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran that will mean strict limits and inspections on its nuclear programme. Under the agreement, Iran will grant the International Atomic Energy Agency unprecedented access to verify adherence to the constraints placed on its nuclear programme, including through implementation of the Additional Protocol to Iran's Safeguards Agreement. That Plan of Action is underpinned by the principles of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons; it will give the international community confidence that Iran's nuclear programme is, and will remain, exclusively peaceful. Our focus is now on the swift and full implementation of the Plan.
That framework of laws, norms and institutions as it applies to the issues dealt with by this Committee has matured over time and is durable.

The Treaty on the Non Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons remains vitally important to the international community. It has played an unparalleled role in curtailing the nuclear arms race and it continues to play a role in keeping the world safe. It is disappointing that this year’s Review Conference narrowly missed achieving consensus on a final document despite the best efforts of many, ours not least amongst them.

But the lack of consensus this year does not undermine the Treaty nor change States’ obligations under it. The Action Plan agreed at the 2010 Review Conference provides a comprehensive roadmap for all NPT States to take forward activity on disarmament, non-proliferation and peaceful uses of nuclear technology. It remains valid, as do the agreements from 2000 and 1995.

Just on the disarmament pillar, the 2010-2015 Review Cycle witnessed some important developments. There was an unprecedented level of transparency between the nuclear weapon states and between the nuclear weapons states and non-nuclear weapon states. The number of deployed nuclear weapons continued to decrease. The United Kingdom reduced the number of operationally available warheads to no more than 120. The United Kingdom will continue to pursue such actions, working closely with our partners in the NPT.

While we regret that a Conference on the establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction and their means of delivery has not been convened, we are in no doubt that the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East remains valid until its goals and objectives are achieved. We are
absolutely committed to the creation of such a zone in line with the 1995 Resolution and the steps agreed in 2010.

Indeed, it is because of the seriousness with which we view our responsibilities as a co-sponsor of the 1995 Resolution that we were unable to join consensus at this year’s NPT Review Conference. To have a meaningful chance of success, any process leading to the establishment of such a Zone in the Middle East must be on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at by all states of the region. We stand ready to assist further in such a process in any way we can and, to this end, will continue to liaise formally and informally with the co-sponsors and the states of the region.

Mr Chairman, in several important areas the framework of laws, norms and institutions continues to be strengthened.

We are pleased that the Chemical Weapons Convention has almost achieved universality. We welcome the recent accessions of Burma and Angola and look forward to welcoming South Sudan to the Convention in the near future. We urge the three remaining UN member states who have not yet taken the positive decision to join the Convention, the DPRK, Egypt and Israel, to do so without further delay. Further strengthening of the Convention will come through full and effective national implementation and the maintenance of the credibility of the Convention’s verification regime.

Putting the Arms Trade Treaty into action is an important step forward, adding to the framework of laws and norms on conventional weapons. The Treaty’s First Conference of States Parties was successful in laying the foundations for effective operational support to the Treaty. Working with partners, our priorities now should be two-fold: Securing effective implementation of the Treaty by States Parties and continuing our efforts to promote its universalisation. The Treaty’s strength depends on the number of States
Parties that have ratified or acceded and embedded the requirements of the Treaty into their national export control processes.

The United Kingdom strongly supports the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. We believe it is all our interests to ensure the Convention remains relevant and effective. The Convention’s Review Conference in November 2016 provides an important opportunity for us to improve confidence in States Parties compliance. We believe that in order to ensure a productive Review Conference we must make even more use of the Preparatory Committee process next year, focusing on matters of substance in addition to the normal administrative matters.

The United Kingdom is committed to improving the security of nuclear and radioactive materials. We work closely with international partners, both bilaterally and through international organisations such as the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency, to secure materials and weapons of mass destruction. Our Global Threat Reduction Programme provided over £9 million to the IAEA’s Nuclear Security Fund between April 2013 and March 2015 and we are pleased to have played a key role in the final removal of Highly Enriched Uranium from Uzbekistan just last month. Looking ahead, we see the fourth Nuclear Security Summit and the IAEA International Conference on Nuclear Security in 2016 as key opportunities to strengthen international cooperation in this area.

Key states whose nuclear facilities are not all under safeguards, the United Kingdom amongst them, have declared moratoria on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. The United Kingdom sees the start and early conclusion of negotiations of a treaty banning the production of such fissile material as an essential step on any route to nuclear disarmament and the negotiation of a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty, in the Conference on Disarmament, further to the adoption of a
balanced and comprehensive Programme of Work, is a priority for us. In this regard, we are pleased the Group of Government Experts established on this issue was able to produce a substantive report. We commend the report to the General Assembly.

We should not forget that there are some significant challenges to the framework of laws, norms and institutions that underpin our work.

The United Kingdom condemns the DPRK’s continued development of its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes in direct violation of UN Security Council Resolutions, as well as its refusal to comply with international norms and laws. It is essential that all UN Member States continue to work to prevent the DPRK from acquiring and developing nuclear weapons, and ensure robust implementation of the UN sanctions regimes to control the DPRK’s access to proliferation sensitive material and prevent it from exporting arms and technology. The DPRK must abide by its obligations under the UN Security Council Resolutions and the NPT. This includes not conducting further nuclear tests, or tests involving ballistic missile technologies.

Reports of ongoing use of chemical weapons in Syria, and Iraq are appalling. The United Kingdom condemns any use of chemical weapons, by anyone, anywhere. Since the adoption of UNSCR 2209 in March, there have been over 90 allegations of chemical weapon use in Syria and the overwhelming majority of these are allegations against the Assad regime. All credible allegations must be investigated, and the perpetrators must be held accountable. We hope that rapid implementation of the impartial Joint UN/OPCW Investigative Mechanism into allegations of chemical weapons use in Syria will help to address this. It is vitally important that having created the Mechanism states now move to fund it. The United Kingdom is pleased to contribute an immediate cash injection of £150,000.
While we welcome the progress made on the destruction of Syria's declared chemical weapons programme, we remain concerned about outstanding issues highlighted by the OPCW in their DAT report of October on Syria's declaration under the Chemical Weapons Convention. The lack of a clear explanation for enormous quantities of Schedule I chemicals and precursors, and the failure of the Government of Syria to provide satisfactory answers to questions about samples, research facilities, and its chemical weapons programme as required by the CWC, must not go unchallenged. The Government of Syria must comply with its obligations under the CWC, including offering full transparency, for the international community to have confidence in the integrity of their statements, that they have fully declared their programme, and that all relevant materials have been destroyed.

Mr Chairman, as new issues emerge, we should consider how the framework of laws, norms and institutions can be applied to them.

The United Kingdom strongly believes that in order to ensure that the Outer Space environment is maintained for the benefit of all humankind, nations must work to extend the rules based international system to Space. We are disappointed that countries could not enter into negotiations when they met in New York in July though it did serve as a useful exchange on some of the key principles of norms of behaviour that help preserve Outer Space for the global common good. It was apparent that all present agreed on the need for space-faring nations, and those who aspire to become space-faring nations, to move forwards on transparency and confidence building measures in Space, covering both civilian and military activity. The United Kingdom will continue to support and work towards that objective and encourages other nations to support this for the benefit of all.

The United Kingdom welcomes the report of the recent UN Group of Governmental Experts on international cyber security. It reaffirms that
international law is applicable in cyberspace. States’ adherence to international law, in particular their UN Charter obligations, is an essential framework for their actions in their use of Information and Communication Technologies. The references both to the inherent right of States to self defence, as recognised in the UN Charter, and to the principles of necessity, proportionality, humanity and distinction as enshrined in International Humanitarian Law, provide important clarity on the legal rights and responsibilities of states.

We also welcome the report’s recommendations on norms of responsible state behaviour and confidence building measures. Voluntary, non-binding norms can strengthen international security by establishing clear expectations and standards for state activity in cyberspace. We welcome too recognition of the role of capacity building in strengthening international cyber security.

Mr Chairman, the framework of laws, norms and institutions that together constitute the rules-based international system has endured and strengthened over the last seventy years, evolving to face new challenges in a process that has seen periods of slow progress and periods of rapid progress but progress nonetheless. Those are seventy years in which war on the scale that characterised the preceding seventy years has not been repeated.

The system has been challenged in the past and it is being challenged now. There is no denying the increased uncertainty that exists in today’s global security environment. In the face of this uncertainty, we firmly believe that the stability we seek in relations between nations is best realised through the rules-based international system. Working, together, through the system, patiently and methodically, we can ensure that the hard won gains of the last seventy years are built upon, not squandered.