UNGA 70th First Committee Statement by Ambassador Matthew Rowland UK Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament

New York, 21st October 2015

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The United Kingdom remains committed to a step-by-step approach to nuclear disarmament through the NPT process. Our approach to nuclear arms control is linked to the international security environment. The UK has reduced the size of its nuclear forces by well over 50% since our Cold War peak. We now have a single design of warhead, a single type of delivery system and a single type of platform - the SSBN. This year we reduced our total number of operationally available warheads to no more than 120, and we will reduce our nuclear weapon stockpile to no more than 180 by the mid-2020s. The UK will retain a credible and effective minimum nuclear deterrent for as long as the global security situation makes that necessary.

We recognise that, despite significant reductions in global warhead numbers after the Cold War, there is frustration by some at the perceived slow pace of disarmament. This was evident at the Vienna conference on the humanitarian impact of the use of nuclear weapons, which the UK attended.

Some present at this conference have emphasised the catastrophic consequences that could result from the use of nuclear weapons. The UK agrees but these consequences are not new. They were known at the creation of the NPT and remain the same today. We hope never to employ nuclear weapons, but to deliver a deterrent effect under all circumstances, to prevent a nuclear war and to contribute to our national security. We continue to place the utmost importance on keeping our nuclear weapons stockpile safe and secure. The UK is therefore committed to maintaining only a minimum nuclear deterrent and our policy is to deter the most extreme threats to the UK or our vital interests, including our NATO Allies.

We do not agree that there is a legal gap hindering disarmament, as some of those promoting the humanitarian consequences initiative contend, and that such a gap should be filled with a ban treaty. To create a world without nuclear weapons that remains free of nuclear weapons, disarmament cannot take place in isolation of the very real international security concerns that we face. That is why the NPT, in its near universal form, has been the cornerstone of efforts to end the nuclear arms race and pursue negotiations in good faith on nuclear disarmament.

We recognise that some champion a nuclear weapons convention. More work is needed by all states to create the undiminished international security conditions necessary for the full implementation of Article VI to take place. A nuclear weapons convention is something that could be used, very effectively, to maintain a world free from nuclear weapons but not an instrument to get us to such a world.
Simply going to zero now will not fulfil the requirement of undiminished security for all, nor is it meaningful to put a timeframe on when those conditions should exist. Working patiently and methodically there is much we can do together to continue creating those conditions.

We believe a ban on nuclear weapons risks undermining the NPT, creating a far less certain world of the sort we inhabited before the NPT's entry into force and near universality, when many regions were faced with the prospect of nuclear proliferation, and uncertainty and mistrust impeded access to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

The Entry into Force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty would be a tangible step towards our goal. We encourage all States remaining outside of the Treaty, NWS and NNWS alike, to sign up and make a commitment not to carry out any nuclear weapon test explosion or any other nuclear explosion. We fully support efforts to develop the verification regime for the CTBT, including early completion and provisional operationalisation of the international monitoring system and would encourage states to cooperate in ensuring that the verification regime is capable of meeting all the treaty mandated technical requirements.

The start and early conclusion of negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive purposes is another essential step on any route to nuclear disarmament. This should remain a priority for all.

Verification will be an essential aspect of any further step on disarmament. We are in the second decade of an active partnership with the United States on monitoring and verification research. And because NNWS will need to have confidence in disarmament verification, we have undertaken ground breaking research on this with Norway, the first such collaboration with a NNWS. We are pleased to announce that we will soon start to collaborate with Sweden. The US IPNDV creates an opportunity for all of the P5 countries and a wider group of NNWS to work together on these issues for the first time.

The attainment of a world free of nuclear weapons will require much greater trust than exists today, trust between states possessing nuclear weapons and trust between those states and non-nuclear weapons states. We initiated a dialogue between the P5 to this end, and note that the Process reached an unprecedented level of transparency last year. We will continue to seek to build trust between all.