THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

STATEMENT ON OTHER WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

to the

71st UNGA First Committee

New York, 18th October 2016

Please check against delivery
The UK condemns any use of chemical weapons, by anyone anywhere.

The ongoing use of chemical weapons in Syria is appalling. Since the First Committee last met, there have been over 100 allegations of CW use there. The overwhelming majority of these are allegations against the Assad regime.

All credible allegations that chemical weapons have been used must be investigated, and any perpetrators who are identified must be held accountable. After a year of painstaking investigation, the UN/OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism into allegations of chemical weapons use in Syria has published its clear findings:

First, that the Syrian Arab Armed Forces used chemical weapons in Talmenes, Syria, on 21 April 2014;
Second, that the Syrian Arab Armed Forces used chemical weapons in Sarmin, Syria, on 16 March 2015, and;
Third, that Daesh used chemical weapons in Marea, Syria, on 21 August 2015;

We wait to hear at the end of this month whether there will be additional findings of responsibility in a further three cases where the OPCW has confirmed chemical weapons were used.

Furthermore, the Syrian regime’s actions in using barrel bombs containing chlorine, as clearly stated by the JIM, is a clear breach of UN Security Council resolutions 2118 (2013), 2209 (2015) and 2235 (2015), as well as Syria’s obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Members of this Committee have long said that those responsible for using chemical weapons must be held to account. Now that the use of chemical weapons has clearly been attributed to a member of the UN, we must act on those words. To do otherwise risks normalising the use of chemical weapons and undermining the credibility of the UN, the OPCW, and the wider international system. It is therefore essential that we have a robust international response. We must work together to see justice for the victims of these heinous weapons, and to ensure that the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, stops.

The use by Daesh of sulphur mustard is also a war crime. Confirmation by the OPCW of chemicals weapons use by non-state actors in Iraq underlines the total disregard by such groups for the rule of international law and norms of behaviour. It serves only to reinforce our commitment to defeat Daesh and all that they stand for.

Beyond the use of chemical weapons in Syria, we remain concerned about outstanding issues highlighted by the OPCW in July, namely that there continue to be “serious gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies” in Syria’s CWC declaration. The Syrian government has failed to provide the required transparency and meaningful cooperation with the OPCW; and the OPCW’s Declaration Assessment Team found that various chemical weapons agents were present at locations where they should not have been.
The Syrian government's dishonesty and obfuscation in its dealings with both the JIM and with the OPCW leads us to believe that Syria has sought to preserve its chemical weapon capabilities. Unless the international community responds robustly we are likely to see the retention of these capabilities and the continued use of toxic chemicals as weapons.

Mr Chairman, there are also positive aspects as regards the Chemical Weapons Convention. It has almost achieved universality and we urge the remaining UN member states who have not yet taken the positive decision to join the Convention to do so without further delay.

The UK supports the strengthening of the Convention, including full and effective national implementation and maintaining the credibility of its verification regime. In particular, we welcome ongoing efforts to tackle the use of chemical weapons by non-state actors through full implementation, and the strengthening, of existing mechanisms.

Indeed, the removal of Libya's remaining chemical weapons precursors this year was an excellent example of how these mechanisms can be successful. The Libyan Government of National Accord, working with the OPCW, and the international community were able to remove the remaining chemicals from Libya for safe and timely destruction in a third country. The UK was honoured to play a major role both in practical assistance and in encouraging international efforts to assist Libya and the OPCW to achieve this, including in the UN Security Council.

We would like to underline our support for the statement made [today/on 17 Oct] by the President-Designate of the Review Conference, His Excellency, György Molnár, on behalf of the Foreign Ministers of Hungary, the US, the Russian Federation and the UK on the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. We would like to emphasise the importance we attach to strengthening of the BTWC: we believe it is in all our interests to ensure the Convention remains relevant and effective to promote common understanding and take effective action, bringing the fundamentals – science and technology – much more to the fore. The Convention's Review Conference next month provides an important opportunity for us to make changes that the Convention needs to improve its effectiveness and implementation. We will work constructively to realise that goal.

The prevention of the proliferation of ballistic missiles is of the utmost importance to the UK. Such proliferation in tandem with the illicit development of WMD poses a grave danger to regional and global peace and security.
In this regard, we remain deeply concerned by the DPRK's continued development of its ballistic missile programmes. Most recently, on 5 September, we saw the DPRK conduct launches using ballistic missile technology and on 9 September the DPRK carried out its fifth nuclear test. These were in flagrant defiance of UN Security Council resolutions. We welcome the strong international condemnation of this launch and test, along with other recent provocations; in particular we welcome the unanimous adoption of UNSCR 2270 on 2 March, which contained further significant measures to limit the DPRK's continued development of both its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes.

In early March 2016, Iran conducted a series of short and medium range ballistic missile launches. These launches are wholly inconsistent with UNSCR 2231 and the UK, along with partners, has written to the UN Security Council to express our serious concern. Iran's ballistic missile programme continues to be sanctioned and UNSCR 2231 retains restrictions on the programme for a further 8 years. We must all remain vigilant and ensure these restrictions are rigorously enforced.

As we know, the ballistic missile threat is not limited to one particular region and it is growing. A strong multilateral response is required to combat this threat. In this regard, the UK recognises and praises the extremely important and valuable work of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and the Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation (HCoC) as the two principle instruments in the field of ballistic missile proliferation. The UK welcomes India's recent accession to both these regimes which will strengthen substantially their effectiveness and objectives. We look forward to working with them, and other partners, to further our collective efforts to prevent the proliferation of WMD and their delivery systems, an obligation of course for all UN members under UNSCR 1540.

Finally, I wish to mention UN Security Council Resolution 1540. Twelve years after the adoption of UNSCR 1540, the Comprehensive Review provides an important opportunity to assess and strengthen its implementation. We hope the review will lead to a new UN Security Council Resolution later this year to reaffirm the importance of UNSCR 1540 and support its full implementation.