THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND

STATEMENT ON OTHER WEAPONS OF
MASS DESTRUCTION

72nd UNGA First Committee

New York, 16th October 2017

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Mr/Mme Chairperson,

The continued use of chemical weapons in Syria is not only a terrible tragedy for the victims, but an appalling contravention of the global norm against their use. Despite near universal condemnation, these attacks have not ceased, and we have again seen use of the nerve agent sarin.

The UK condemns any use of chemical weapons, by anyone anywhere. Almost a year ago, the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism clearly identified that the Syrian Arab Armed Forces had used chlorine in three separate attacks in 2014 and 2015; and that Daesh had used sulphur mustard in an attack in 2015.

It is to our great regret that the UN Security Council has still not been able to take action in response to these findings. A Resolution condemning these attacks was vetoed by Russia and China. Accountability for these crimes still eludes us.

In the meantime, attacks have continued in Syria. The OPCW has confirmed use of the nerve agent sarin in the town of Khan Sheikhoun on 4 April this year, resulting in approximately 100 deaths, and more recently has identified the presence of sarin in samples from nearby Al Latamineh, where an attack had been reported just a few days before the one in Khan Sheikhoum.

It is no surprise that outstanding issues remain with Syria’s Chemical Weapons Convention declaration. The OPCW confirmed earlier this month that there continue to be "serious gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies" in Syria’s CWC declaration. After 4 years, the Syrian government has still failed to offer full cooperation with the OPCW. The OPCW has detected the presence of chemical weapons agents at locations where according to Syria’s account of its programme there should not have been any trace. The OPCW
has detected the presence of agents of which there is no mention in Syria's declaration.

It is vital that international investigations into the Syrian declaration and the perpetrators of attacks continue, and that the mandate of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism is renewed.

The use by Daesh of sulphur mustard is similarly abhorrent. Confirmation by the OPCW of chemicals weapons use by non-state actors in Iraq, as well as Syria, underlines the total disregard by such groups for the rule of international law and norms of behaviour. We welcome ongoing efforts to tackle the use of chemical weapons by non-state actors through full implementation of the Convention, and the strengthening of existing mechanisms.

Mr Chairman, this year marks twenty years since the Chemical Weapons Convention came into force in 1997. We urge the remaining four UN member states not yet Party to the convention, to join without delay.

We strongly support the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention as the cornerstone of the international ban on biological weapons. Key priorities are universalization and more effective implementation by all States Parties. Transparency and confidence-building measures, cooperation and assistance, and practical steps to reinforce the UN Secretary General's Mechanism for investigation of alleged use of chemical and biological weapons are essential tools to strengthen the Convention. As the Eighth Review Conference was unable to achieve consensus on a substantive programme of work for the intersessional period, and as we approach the next Meeting of States Parties in December, we call on all States Parties to redouble their efforts to promote and secure agreement on a strengthened future inter-sessional process,
The proliferation of ballistic missiles, in tandem with the illicit development of WMD, poses a grave danger to regional and global peace and security. As we have said in our earlier statement, the DPRK's continued reckless development of its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes poses a grave threat to international peace and security.

The UK remains fully committed to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. Iran's ballistic missile programme remains sanctioned. This year, Iran has conducted a number of launches, including of medium range ballistic missiles and a space launch vehicle. This is inconsistent with UNSCR 2231 and contributes to regional instability. We urge Iran to refrain from such activity. We must all do more to ensure that UNSCR 2231 is rigorously enforced; we urge all partners to report any evidence that Iran is conducting activity contrary to UNSCR 2231 to the UN Security Council.

Events this year have again shown that the ballistic missile threat is real, and growing. We need a strong multilateral response. The Missile Technology Control Regime – celebrating its 30th anniversary this year - and the Hague Code of Conduct are the two principal instruments in the field of ballistic missile proliferation, and the UK welcomes their important work. We must continue to support the regimes, and ensure effective implementation of their provisions, to help prevent the proliferation of WMD and their delivery systems, an obligation for all UN members under UNSCR 1540. To increase the effectiveness of these regimes, we call on those UN states who are not currently members to consider acceding or adhering.

Finally, I wish to highlight UN Security Council Resolution 1540 and the central role it plays in preventing nuclear, chemical and biological material falling into the hands of terrorists. Last year's Comprehensive Review and the adoption of 2325 was the most significant revision to the work of 1540 in its 13 year history, and a welcome example of Council consensus on non-proliferation issues. We must continue to support its effective implementation if we are to tackle the threat that terrorists pose.