THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND

STATEMENT FOR THE GENERAL DEBATE

Matthew Rowland
UK Permanent Representative
to the Conference on Disarmament

72nd UNGA First Committee

New York, 6 October 2016

Please check against delivery
The defining purpose of the United Nations is to maintain international peace and security, to develop friendly relations among nations, to achieve international cooperation in solving problems. These values and the rules they imbue are central to the United Kingdom's national interest, to our security and prosperity.

The UN framework of laws, norms and institutions is as vital to the conduct of the issues dealt by this Committee as to any other. And it is this rules-based system which enables the global cooperation through which we can protect those values.

Yet we are confronted by states deliberately flouting for their own gain the rules and standards that have secured our collective prosperity and security: The unforgivable use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime against its own people; The outrageous proliferation of nuclear weapons by North Korea and a threat to use them.

Following UN-OPCW investigations confirming that the Syrian regime has used chemical weapons on its own people, we have a responsibility to stand up, to hold the Syrian regime to account. This responsibility sits with us all, but a particular special responsibility lies on the shoulders of the permanent members of the Security Council. We need to ensure that the investigations mandated by the Security Council continue their vital work to identify the perpetrators of the continuing chemical weapons attacks, and then to take action to hold them to account. We need to increase pressure on the Syrian regime - including through its backers – to turn away from the military campaign and pursue the political track in a meaningful way.

Now we face an even more immediate, global danger in the activities of Kim Jong Un and his regime in DPRK. Time after time he's shown contempt for the international community of law-abiding states. Contempt for his
neighbours and contempt for the institutions and rules that have preserved
peace and security. On this challenge, the UN in recent weeks has shown it
can step up to the task. With UNSCR 2375 creating the biggest sanctions
package of the 21st Century. We have seen regional and global powers
coming together and as in its founding charter putting aside limited self-
interests to show leadership on behalf of the wider world. But despite these
efforts, DPRK continues to defy and provoke the international community and
threaten its neighbours. And so all security council members must continue to
live up to the special responsibilities that are placed upon us, and in seeking
to resolve this crisis, be prepared to take on necessary measures to tackle this
threat, in order to bring stability to the Korean Peninsula. But these measures
will only work if fully implemented. So all States must ensure that they comply
with all the measures so that together we can persuade the North Korean
regime to choose a different path.

There is no doubt that today’s global security environment pose challenges
that test our values, our vision and our resolve to defend the rules and
standards that underpin our collective security and prosperity.

The UK has a strong record on nuclear disarmament. We’ve reduced our own
nuclear weapons capabilities and continue to do so. Of the recognised
nuclear weapons States, we possess only approximately 1% of the total global
stockpile of nuclear weapons. The UK initiated the P5 process to bring
together nuclear weapons States to build trust and confidence to help develop
the conditions which we believe will ultimately take us to our shared goal of a
world without nuclear weapons.

As has been made clear, the UK, as a responsible Nuclear Weapons State,
has been pursuing a step by step approach to nuclear disarmament consistent
with the NPT and its other treaty commitments. But the UK has not taken part
in the negotiation of the treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons, and does not
intend to sign, ratify or become party to it. The treaty will therefore not be binding on the UK. Furthermore, the UK would not accept any argument that this treaty can constitute a development of customary international law binding on the UK or on other non-parties. Importantly, states possessing nuclear weapons have not taken part in the negotiations.

The ban treaty fails to address the key issues that must first be overcome to achieve lasting global nuclear disarmament. It will not improve the international security environment or increase trust and transparency. Nor does it address the considerable technical and procedural challenges involved in nuclear disarmament verification.

We are working to address all these issues, but the unpredictable international security environment we face today demands the maintenance of the UK’s nuclear deterrent for the foreseeable future. Other states might use their nuclear capability to threaten us, try to constrain our decision making in a crisis and there is a risk of further proliferation of nuclear weapons.

The ban treaty is at odds with the existing non-proliferation and disarmament architecture. This risks undermining the NPT, which has been at the heart of global non-proliferation and disarmament efforts for almost 50 years, and the IAEA Safeguards regime which supports it. The UK remains committed to strengthening each of the NPT’s mutually reinforcing pillars. The 2020 Review Cycle provides an opportunity for us to collectively reaffirm our commitment to the primacy of the NPT as the cornerstone of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime.

The UK has consistently been at the forefront of international efforts to tackle proliferation. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran represents a major step forward in preventing Iran from developing a nuclear weapons
capability. The UK is committed to the full and long-term implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action by all parties.

Looking beyond nuclear weapons, the UK remains committed to the Arms Trade Treaty and its aim of establishing the highest possible common international standards for regulating or improving the regulation of the international trade in conventional arms. We support the priorities of universalisation and implementation of the treaty, since the more widespread the treaty’s influence the greater its ability to prevent and eradicate the illicit trade in conventional arms and prevent their diversion while creating a stable, reliable and transparent environment in which governments and legitimate companies can operate. It is important that States, civil society and industry work together to achieve this shared goal.

The UK fully supports the fight against illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition and stands ready to work with partners to stop these weapons from falling into the hands of criminals and terrorists. We commend the efforts of UN agencies, multilateral organisations, bilateral donors and civil society organisations in strengthening international cooperation and assistance.

Landmines are a global scourge that destroy opportunity and hope. The UK is also committed to the goal of freeing the world of anti-personnel mines and, to this end, has announced a £100 million UK Aid package over the next three years. It will clear and make safe 150 square kilometres of land, help 800,000 people live their lives free from the threat of mines, and ensure that every year, over 100,000 people – especially children – fully understand the dangers posed by landmines and how to avoid them.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the outer space treaty. Space capabilities now deliver immense benefits to billions of people across the
globe but we need to ensure that the benefits are broadly felt around the world. The UK believes that the future of international governance of space needs to reflect the complex mixture of actors and activity, and establish voluntary principles of responsible behaviour across all fields of activity.

Mr Chairman

As our Prime Minister observed last month here in New York, throughout the history of the UN, countries have shown time and time again that by being true to our values, rules, and standards, it is possible to come together and to deliver in ways that have an extraordinary impact. We share a responsibility to do so again.

This means reforming our United Nations and the wider international system so it can prove its worth in helping us to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. And it means ensuring that those who flout the rules and spirit of our international system are held to account, that nations honour their responsibilities and play their part in upholding and renewing a rules-based international order that can deliver prosperity and security for us all.