Letter dated 29 April 1977 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have been asked by my Government to convey to Your Excellency the following message:

Resolution 31/189 B of the thirty-first session of the United Nations General Assembly invited all Member States to communicate to Your Excellency their views on the agenda and all other relevant questions relating to the special session of the General Assembly on disarmament, which is due to be held in New York in May/June 1978. The following are the views of the United Kingdom Government.

1. Progress towards multilateral disarmament is essential to lessen the risk of military confrontation and to strengthen international peace and security. The United Kingdom Government believe that effective multilateral disarmament will give equal or greater security at a reduced level of armaments, pave the way towards the ultimate achievement of general and complete disarmament and release more resources for important social and economic needs.

2. The United Kingdom Government have for many years been committed to the achievement of general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control. However the level of international confidence has not permitted direct progress to that objective. By general consent the international community has worked for a series of intermediate steps designed to reduce the level of armaments and to increase international confidence. The United Kingdom Government have participated in all the major multinational disarmament conferences since 1945, and have ratified all the arms control and disarmament treaties which these conferences have produced.

3. The United Kingdom Government wish to see a successful outcome to the special session on disarmament and are pledged to play a constructive part in the session’s preparation. They believe that the special session could enhance the prospects for disarmament, provided that it is thoroughly prepared and widely attended, particularly by all significant military powers.
4. The special session will provide the first occasion in recent years when disarmament in all its aspects will be a major focus of international public attention. The United Kingdom Government therefore believe that it is important for any proposals advanced at the session to be carefully considered, if the session is to avoid arousing false hopes and expectations leading to public disillusionment and frustration.

5. The special session will require a common recognition of the limitations of what can be achieved at one conference of limited duration. Because of the profound importance and complexity of the issues, effective disarmament measures require expert study and patient international negotiation. Accordingly, the United Kingdom Government do not expect the special session to negotiate arms control agreements or to resolve longstanding problems immediately but they believe its purpose should be to give an impulse to multilateral, regional and bilateral negotiations. However, they hope that it will be possible for the special session to reach agreement on the general principles for effective measures of disarmament, which will also indicate the priorities for negotiation.

6. The United Kingdom Government believe, that the following could form the framework of the special session's agenda:

   (1) Review of achievements to date: and identification of the main sectors (nuclear and conventional, global and regional), where further action is necessary.

   (2) Discussion of general principles which should govern the approach to such action, taking into account the practical experience gained in previous disarmament negotiations.

   (3) Adoption of general priorities for action, with broad indications of what might best be dealt with multilaterally, regionally or bilaterally.

   (4) Examination of disarmament machinery, including the role of the United Nations.

7. The United Kingdom believe that the greatest assistance which the special session could give towards the achievement of disarmament would be to further a climate in which mutual international confidence will be increased. For it is by increasing mutual confidence, rather than by proposing any fundamental change in the machinery of disarmament, that the special session can chart a practicable and realistic course forward.

(Signed) Ivor RICHARD