THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND

STATEMENT ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS

By

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to the

69th UNGA First Committee

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Please check against delivery
Thank you Mr Chairman. The United Kingdom aligns itself with the statement made in this debate on behalf of the European Union. In particular, as I will not be commenting further on the matter now, I draw attention to three important paragraphs on the NPT at the start of that statement which include our commitment to a successful NPT RevCon next year.

Mr Chairman
The United Kingdom remains fully committed to a world without nuclear weapons and firmly believes that the best way to achieve this goal is through a gradual step by step approach.

We understand the frustration of those who want faster progress as expressed through the discourse on the humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons.

We are deeply concerned at the humanitarian consequences which could result from the use of nuclear weapons. That is why we do our utmost to avoid their use. We do not, however, share the view that nuclear weapons per se are inherently unacceptable. We consider that nuclear weapons have helped to guarantee our security, and that of our allies, for decades.

Frustration rarely makes for sound action however. There are no quick fixes to achieve nuclear disarmament. We do not yet have the right political and security conditions for those without nuclear weapons to feel no need to acquire them, nor for those who do have them to no longer feel the need to keep them. Nor is it possible to identify a timeframe for those conditions.

Tackling proliferation challenges will contribute to those conditions. We can all play our part. Along with E3+3 partners, the United Kingdom is fully committed to reaching an agreement with Iran which ensures Iran’s nuclear programme is exclusively peaceful. We encourage implementation of the UN’s sanctions regime to control the DPRK’s access to proliferation sensitive material and to prevent them from exporting arms and technology.

Increased trust and transparency between the nuclear weapon states will also contribute to the right conditions. That is why we instigated a regular dialogue among the P5 in 2009 and why are initiating a second cycle of the process by hosting the sixth P5 conference next February in London.

Collectively we have already responded to changes in the political and security landscape: the end of the Cold War had a very real impact on disarmament – from over 60,000 nuclear warheads in the 1980s, the number of nuclear warheads in the world has been reduced to around 17,000 – well under a third of their Cold War peak.

The United Kingdom’s own record on nuclear disarmament is strong. We have reduced the size of our own nuclear forces by well over 50% since our Cold War peak. In 2010, we announced that, by the mid-2020s, we will have reduced our nuclear forces to no more than 120 operationally available warheads and a total stockpile of no more than 180 warheads. This work is ongoing. For more
detailed information on what we have done, please see the national report we submitted to the third NPT PrepCom.

The United Kingdom does not see the step by step process as being a purely sequential one, and we certainly have not waited for one step to be complete before starting on the next.

We know, for example, that 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 non-nuclear weapon states will need to have confidence in verification, we have undertaken ground-breaking research into the challenges of verifying the dismantlement of nuclear warheads through the UK-Norway Initiative, the first such joint project with a non-nuclear weapon state.

We are pleased to have signed the Protocol to the Central Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone Treaty in May and we will ratify that Protocol as soon as possible. We welcome the meeting earlier this month between the P5 and South East Asian partners, and hope that we can soon sign the Protocol to the South East Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone.

We also remain fully committed to the goal of establishing a Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone, and we recognize that its achievement will contribute significantly to regional and global security. The past year has seen significant steps towards the holding of a conference on this matter in Helsinki, and the UK has been encouraged by the progress made to date.

Looking ahead, an important step will be the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. We urge all remaining Annex II States to ratify the treaty. Another important step will be the negotiation of a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty in the Conference on Disarmament. We fully support the work of the Group of Government Experts on this topic and look forward to its report next year, which we hope will bring us closer to negotiations.

Mr Chairman

Given the current global security situation, achieving further significant progress on nuclear disarmament will not be easy. But the United Kingdom remains committed to the goal of a world without nuclear weapons and will continue to play a constructive role towards this end, both within the P5 process and with our partners across the international community.