

2009 First Committee Nuclear Statement

The United Kingdom associates itself fully with the statement delivered by Sweden on behalf of the European Union.

Mr Chairman, distinguished Colleagues,

This is a decisive time for the international community. Nuclear issues are among the most critical we face. As the UK's Foreign Secretary David Milliband put it recently: Get it right, and we will increase global security, pave the way for a world without nuclear weapons, and improve access to affordable, safe and dependable energy. Get it wrong, and we face a new and dangerous era of new state nuclear weapon holders and the chilling prospect of nuclear material falling into the hands of terrorists. We must work collectively and robustly to strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime. At the same time we recognise there is a need for all nuclear armed states to pursue active disarmament in a way that will command the confidence of all the non-nuclear weapon states.

At the UN Security Council Summit on 24 September, leaders from nuclear and non-nuclear weapons states, including UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown, sent an unequivocal and united message that they are committed to creating the conditions for a world free of nuclear weapons. We stand firmly by that commitment. The unanimous adoption of Security Council resolution 1887 gives us a shared vision and the blueprint to address the difficult challenges ahead.

Now, I could sit before you today and elaborate on the UK's exemplary record on nuclear disarmament. But you have heard it all before and the steps we have taken are well known. We have set out our national position in two

widely published documents, “Lifting the Nuclear Shadow” and the “Road to 2010”, which was launched by our Prime Minister in July. The UK remains dedicated to working towards a world without nuclear weapons and is fully committed to its obligations under the Non Proliferation Treaty.

What I would rather do today is to lay down a challenge to the First Committee – if we are to make the world a safer and more secure place, then we need to focus on what binds us rather than what divides us. No one can disagree that nuclear proliferation is a threat to international peace and stability, that nuclear security must be a priority and that we all want the certainty that nuclear weapons will never again be used. We share a common responsibility to enable access to peaceful nuclear energy, whilst guarding against its appropriation for offensive purposes.

It is time for us to look forwards rather than backwards. When we sit in First Committee in 2010, what will success look like? If in these 12 months of opportunity, we are still camped on national positions and engaging in zero sum debates, then I suggest we will all have failed. If however, we have managed to move forward on issues of common concern and are working together to address our mutual concerns, then I think we can say that we will have made progress and advanced on the trajectory towards a world without nuclear weapons.

I acknowledge that this will not be easy. For the UK’s part, we would like to vote in favour of more resolutions than we currently do. Key to achieving greater consensus will be greater engagement by all and a willingness to compromise on sometimes long held positions. We will endeavour to play our part in this and seek earlier engagement in the future.

We can make progress if we engage on the issues which concern us. This means, for example, returning to the table at the Conference on Disarmament and adopting a Programme of Work in 2010 which kick-starts negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty. We know that some States have concerns about a FMCT – these are concerns that are better addressed transparently at a negotiating table, rather than being plunged into the deep freeze. A failure to engage will not make the world a safer place, on a local, regional or indeed global level.

We want to see continued progress on CTBT ratification and a permanent ban on further explosive testing of nuclear weapons. We too want to see further progress by the Nuclear Weapon States under Article VI of the Treaty, which is why the Prime Minister has called for an action plan under this pillar. But let me be clear – there is a “Grand Bargain” which lies at the heart of the NPT and the UK will be seeking action plans for all 3 pillars, along with strong international commitment to tackling the issue of nuclear security. President Obama’s Summit on Nuclear Security in April 2010 is an important milestone.

The 2010 NPT RevCon is also a milestone, not an end in itself. Whilst our attention is rightly focussed on making it a success and reassuring our citizens that we take our obligations seriously, we also have to look beyond this horizon. It is our common responsibility to ensure that momentum is maintained, not just on nuclear disarmament, but on all of the pillars, so that we can deliver what we promised over 40 years ago.