

**UK Statement
to the 2008 Non-Proliferation Treaty Preparatory Committee
Cluster 1 – Nuclear Disarmament
by
Ambassador John Duncan, Ambassador for Multilateral Arms Control and Disarmament,
Geneva, 30 April 2008**

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Mr Chairman

As the UK made clear in our general statement, strengthening the global non-proliferation regime requires States to work together to address their obligations under each of the three pillars of the Non Proliferation Treaty: non-proliferation, disarmament, and the peaceful uses of nuclear technology.

The United Kingdom is absolutely committed to the principles and practice of multilateral nuclear disarmament and to working towards a safer world in which there is no requirement for nuclear weapons. We continue to support the disarmament obligations set out in Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and have an excellent record in meeting these commitments.

The United Kingdom has now reduced the number of our operationally available warheads to fewer than 160, a reduction completed by the end of last year. This represents a reduction of 75% in the explosive power of UK nuclear weapons since the end of the Cold War.

This latest cut is the latest in a series of reductions to the UK arsenal. We have now reduced our reliance on nuclear weapons to one submarine-based system. We have greatly reduced the readiness and capability of that single system. Our Trident submarines are normally at several days “notice to fire” and their missiles are not targeted at any country.

In her speech to the Carnegie Institute in July 2007, the former Foreign Secretary, Margaret Beckett, set out the UK’s commitment to reinforce the vision, and work on the practical steps towards nuclear disarmament. She announced a series of unilateral activities that the UK will undertake as a “Disarmament Laboratory” for the thinking and practical work required to move forward global nuclear disarmament.

We have tasked the UK’s Atomic Weapons Establishment with some detailed work on key stages in the verification of the reduction and elimination of nuclear weapons. They are examining issues related to the verification of disarmament, including the authentication of warheads, chain of custody problems in sensitive nuclear weapons facilities and monitored storage of dismantled nuclear weapons. We will be presenting our latest research at two presentations in the margins of this Preparatory Committee. At the first, on Monday next week, we will outline our trilateral work with Norway and the verification NGO “VERTIC” on managed access to sensitive nuclear facilities and the authentication of nuclear warheads. At the second, on Tuesday, experts from the Atomic Weapons Establishment will explain their national work programme, and describe progress to date.

We are also supporting an independent International Institute of Strategic Studies in-depth study to help determine the requirements for the eventual elimination of all nuclear weapons. The findings of the study will be published in one of the Institute's Adelphi papers in September.

The United Kingdom Secretary of State for Defence announced a further initiative to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva in February, when he indicated that the UK was willing to host a technical conference of scientists from the P5's Nuclear Laboratories. The aim of the conference would be to build mutual confidence in the technologies and technical aspects of verifying nuclear disarmament.

This is a long-term effort and we don't pretend that one conference will solve all these very difficult technical problems. As the Secretary of State said in his speech, we hope that bringing nuclear scientists together from each of the five Nuclear Weapon States will not only provide an opportunity to exchange views and unclassified research on how one might verify nuclear disarmament, a particularly challenging topic in itself, but also help to build confidence between the five Nuclear Weapon States.

In addition to these disarmament initiatives the United Kingdom has produced historical records of our defence holdings of both plutonium and highly enriched uranium. We ceased production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons in 1995. All excess fissile material stocks declared as surplus to defence requirements have been placed under international safeguards and we no longer exercise our right as a nuclear-weapon State to withdraw from such stocks for use in nuclear weapons. We have not conducted a test nuclear explosion since 1991 and we ratified the CTBT in 1998.

We welcome too the substantial disarmament measures taken by other Nuclear Weapon States in line with Article VI obligations. Bilateral agreements between the US and Russia have greatly reduced the major nuclear arsenals since the end of the Cold War, and we look forward to further progress. We therefore particularly welcomed the recent announcement by the US and Russia, following the meeting of their Presidents at Sochi, that they are working towards a legally binding successor to the START Treaty. We also welcome the announcement last month by President Sarkozy that France will cut its number of nuclear warheads to fewer than 300.

It is important, however, to realize that the conditions for complete disarmament are not solely in the gift of Nuclear Weapons States. As article VI of the NPT suggests, it is something on which Nuclear Weapon States and Non Nuclear Weapon States alike have to work together.

It is also reasonable to suggest that a world in which complete nuclear disarmament became a possibility would be one in which we could all be confident in the compliance by all States with their non-proliferation obligations under a universalized NPT. Des Browne noted this in his speech when he said that "although we all understand that there is no formal conditionality between progress on disarmament and non-proliferation, our goal should be a virtuous circle, where progress on one reinforces the other".

So the immediate and practical issue, that faces us all, is how to create the conditions for both of those objectives? In particular, what steps can we take to cap and set on an inevitably downward trend the numbers of weapons out there?

Firstly, we can cap the amount of weapons-usable fissile material. The UK considers a

Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty to be a key priority and the next logical step for multilateral nuclear disarmament. We all recognise the impact of the decade of inactivity in the Conference on Disarmament here in Geneva. The introduction of the P6 Presidencies has breathed new life and an air of optimism into proceedings, and also more focus on how to move forward. We must continue to work hard to bring about the start of negotiations, without preconditions, on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty. As the holder of one of the six CD presidencies in 2008 we support the recently tabled draft declaration, CD 1840, and we call upon those States who have not yet felt able to join the consensus to do so as soon as possible. We all have security concerns about our and other countries' fissile material production, but let's at least get into negotiations, without any preconditions, where these can be appropriately addressed.

Secondly, the United Kingdom believes that we must continue to strive for the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and for continued progress in the development of its verification system. The UK calls on all states yet to do so to ratify the CTBT as soon as possible.

As we continue to work towards nuclear disarmament, the United Kingdom understands and respects the desire of the Non Nuclear Weapon States to receive multilateral guarantees from the Nuclear Weapon States that they will not be threatened or attacked with nuclear weapons. In this regard, the United Kingdom's policy has not changed — we remain committed to the negative and positive security assurances we have given to Non Nuclear Weapon States in our letter to the Secretary-General of the United Nations in 1995, subsequently noted in Security Council resolution 984.

In addition, the United Kingdom believes that the best way of achieving the necessary guarantees sought by the non-nuclear-weapon States is through the protocols annexed to treaties creating nuclear-weapon-free zones. The United Kingdom has given security assurances in association with the treaties of Tlatelolco, Rarotonga and Pelindaba and has, through ratification of the relevant protocols, granted treaty-based negative security assurances to over 100 countries. We hope that the Treaty of Pelindaba will come into fruition soon and encourage those African States that have not yet ratified to do so.

We therefore believe that our 1995 security assurances, and the Protocols to the NWFZ Treaties we have signed, offer non-nuclear-weapon States the assurances they seek regarding the use of nuclear weapons. The most appropriate way forward, and to give further effect to the desires of the non-nuclear-weapon States, is to make further progress with NWFZs, guided by the objectives and principles of the 1999 guidelines of the Disarmament Commission. This will provide, on a credible, regional basis, the internationally binding legal instruments on negative security assurances which many are looking for.

Mr Chairman

In summary, the United Kingdom remains committed to our nuclear disarmament obligations under article VI of the NPT and continues to make progress to this end. The measures we have taken on transparency, verification and disarmament have been widely welcomed, and we continue to look for more opportunities where national security and non-proliferation constraints allow us. But we also understand that a nuclear weapon free world is something on which Nuclear Weapon States and Non Nuclear Weapon States

alike have to work together, which is why we are committed to reinforcing the NPT, which remains the cornerstone of the global non-proliferation and disarmament regime.

The past year has seen a number of positive developments in our global effort towards nuclear disarmament, including several speeches and announcements by Nuclear Weapons States, outlining reductions in nuclear arsenals and further work on taking forward disarmament.