

Conference on Disarmament
Plenary meeting on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty

Statement by Ambassador John Freeman
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom
28 June 2005

1. Mr President, I welcome the opportunity to address you and other CD colleagues on the subject of a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty.
2. The negotiation of an FMCT is a long-held and frequently articulated aspiration of the international community in the field of disarmament. As our Chinese colleague said earlier this morning, negotiation of an FMCT would be the next logical step in the disarmament process. To negotiate and conclude such a treaty would be a valuable contribution to international security. I wish today again to put on record, that the United Kingdom is ready now to begin in the CD, negotiations on an FMCT without preconditions. This is a commitment we stated clearly and authoritatively in the General Debate at the NPT Review Conference last month.
3. The negotiation of an FMCT remains a key aspiration and a high priority for the international community with potential benefits acknowledged by us all. To achieve such a treaty would fix the high water mark of nuclear weapon-usable fissile material and set the stage for further reductions in future.
4. By any standards, an FMCT is ripe for negotiation; not to follow through on this fact, and to start negotiations to this end, would be a dereliction of duty. The international community wants us, in this forum, to negotiate an FMCT. Beyond the walls of this hallowed chamber, it is not understood why we cannot do what is needed, and do so quickly.
5. To negotiate an FMCT is not to deny the perceived need on the part of many in this room, to address also other issues of particular concern to them. On the contrary, we recognise and acknowledge the expressed interest of our CD partners in such issues. We treat our CD partners' concerns and objectives in this regard with the seriousness and respect they deserve. We do not claim a monopoly of wisdom in the field of disarmament, nuclear or otherwise. Like other colleagues, we seek security and we seek it honestly and seriously. We acknowledge as a matter of course, the need to attend to the views of others as we hope and expect others will attend to our perceived security needs and concerns.
6. That successive efforts to agree a Programme of Work in the CD have become mired in procedural disputes, is a matter for deep regret. We must change attitudes to the CD by changing our own attitudes to the work upon which we should be engaged.
7. Most recently, the Netherlands Ambassador when CD President and our New Zealand colleague who followed him into the chair which you, Sir, in turn currently occupy, tried to explore a possible basis for a Programme of Work. In doing so, they tried to take account of the realities: of what CD members want, of others' known views, of what might be possible. For the art of the possible is the art of diplomacy. And our Dutch and New Zealand colleagues tried to capture what they saw as the limits of the possible at this time.

8. We welcome the Food-for-Thought paper (FFTP), which has been at the heart of these recent efforts by CD Presidents. The FFTP takes due account of variant aspirations and concerns whilst not losing sight of both shorter and longer-term issues and perspectives. It is a positive and promising contribution to our collective effort to try to find a way forward.

9. Mr President, the UK is not afraid to debate how best to get the CD back to work; on the contrary, we welcome debate; but we want an honest, realistic and purposeful debate. We are open to the possibilities for discussion of issues of concern to us and CD partners; and, when an issue is ripe for negotiation, we would welcome negotiations.

10. And the issue which quite clearly is ripe for negotiation, is an FMCT. Long-called for and still worth achieving, an FMCT could contribute to the security needs of all of us. Furthermore, whilst the UK is as committed as ever to effective verification of arms control instruments, the key first is to get started on negotiations. Nothing should be ruled out from discussion, including verification, nor and notwithstanding the remarks on this point of the South African Ambassador earlier this morning, has anyone to my knowledge set pre-conditions for the start of FMCT negotiations; but we do need to get started. We need therefore if this immediate goal is to be attained, a commitment to negotiation of an FMCT without preconditions. And, Mr President, we need also to concentrate not on the difficulties which can serve only to delay the start of FMCT negotiations - some of which, from his country's viewpoint, were set out again by the Ambassador of Pakistan this morning - but on beginning negotiations, during which all issues can be addressed.

11. Mr President, negotiation of an FMCT is truly long overdue. The FFTP seems to us a genuine effort to respond actively to the requirement in this forum to begin, without further delay, FMCT negotiations. As the author of the FFTP, Ambassador Sanders, told the CD in his valedictory remarks last week, the FFTP may need some amendment - and I think he may have had in mind an explicit "without preconditions" dimension to the start of FMCT negotiations - but in our view that paper offers a real chance to move towards a consensus way forward on a Programme of Work. And we remain ready, indeed keen, to work with you, Mr President and all colleagues to achieve a compromise way forward on a Programme of Work, including as a priority, negotiations on an FMCT. For to fail to start such negotiations immediately, i.e. with the urgency required, would be to fail to measure up to the responsibilities of those of us privileged to be members of this Conference on Disarmament.

Thank you, Mr President.