

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR JOHN FREEMAN
TO THE CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT
23 FEBRUARY 2006**

Mr President

As this is the first time that my delegation has taken the floor during your Presidency, may I congratulate you and your predecessor for the work that has been done thus far. We are pleased with the speed with which the agenda was adopted and for the initiative of tabling the discussion on the agenda items. May I assure you and the other CD Presidents in 2006, as well as the Friends of the Chair, of my Delegation's continuing support for all your efforts.

Mr President

There are different and complementary ways to pursue wider disarmament objectives, whether unilaterally, bilaterally, through like-minded groups or regional groupings, as well as multilaterally. The UK is committed to achieving progress on arms control and disarmament in all these different and serviceable ways. Whether in the UN or beyond, in regional or other groupings, the UK has worked and will continue to work creatively in pursuit of measures of arms control and disarmament that can contribute to international security. Arms control and disarmament are not avoidable options. They are necessary aspects of attempts to enhance international security. And in many instances, they reflect or promote international obligations, obligations the UK is committed to meet.

It is often remarked upon that the CD is the international community's sole multilateral negotiating and disarmament forum. The UK fully supports and is committed to achieving substantive progress in the CD in the near future and will continue to work to that objective. The CD is too important a mechanism for it to be allowed to lie fallow; we need to use it purposefully to meet key arms control and disarmament challenges. We have therefore supported a number of initiatives in recent years designed to facilitate the CD's return to serious work. You and your P6 colleagues' efforts to encourage a deep and thematic exchange, is the latest such effort, and we welcome it. And as I said here on 25 June last year, the priority for the UK remains the immediate commencement of negotiations without pre-conditions on an FMCT. Listening to the general statements made under the Polish Presidency, we have again been struck by the fact that no delegation disagrees on the need to start negotiations on an FMCT. Surely we can agree without prejudice to anyone's position, to begin negotiations on an FMCT without preconditions? Agreement on this would be core to any understandings designed to break-out from the continuing impasse in the CD. Of course we are aware of differences of view on relative priorities, but it is apparent that only committed movement on FMCT without preconditions can provide the beginnings of a way forward.

The package approach to starting substantive work in the CD has not delivered a consensus agreement on a way forward. We need to recognise this and act on this recognition. Some issues are not ripe for negotiation. None of the formal proposals has so far gained consensus and it is unlikely any will gain consensus now or even in the future. The question is therefore what to do in these circumstances? What is a realistic way forward? There has been throughout the general debate in recent weeks much recognition amongst colleagues that a more imaginative approach is needed. Indeed one of the more creative approaches so far has been the time-tabling of our discussions for the coming year by the P6. We look forward to playing an active role in these discussions, which should demonstrate again that an FMCT is ripe for negotiation. Let's start on this and continue to discuss the other core issues and other key issues, and additional issues, in the formal and informal Plenaries and see where that leads.

On what the P6 have termed additional issues, like other colleagues, we see value in discussing appropriate issues provided that they can command consensus and are relevant to the agenda of the CD.

Mr President, you should be assured that with your P6 colleagues and the Friends of the Chair, that the UK is ready to engage in discussions of substance with a view to finding a way out of this unacceptable deadlock in the CD. If subjects are ripe for negotiations, they should be negotiated; if they require more discussion, let them be discussed. But we cannot credibly any longer hold back action on what is ripe, for reasons of linkage. Given contemporary challenges, can we any longer afford not to start FMCT negotiations; and will civil society in all our countries any longer accept a disabling linkage preventing us responding by beginning such negotiations?