

Strengthening the non-proliferation and disarmament system against growing global instability: UK statement at UN First Committee

Mr Chair

The maintenance of international peace and security, including through the suppression of acts of aggression, is one of the fundamental purposes of the United Nations and at the core of this Committee's mandate. Article 2 of the Charter prohibits the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State. On 24 February this year, the Russian Federation trampled over those fundamental principles by launching an unprovoked and barbaric invasion of its neighbour, Ukraine.

Over seven months into this war, its disastrous impact – on Ukraine, on Russia, and on the world – is clear.

And now, President Putin's efforts to incorporate Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson into the territory of the Russian Federation constitute a new low point in Russia's blatant flouting of international law, and a further violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The United Kingdom is proud to stand in solidarity with the Government and people of Ukraine, as they fight for their freedom and independence.

Mr Chair

Russia's aggression has also cast a long shadow over international disarmament negotiations.

Unable to acknowledge the consequences of its war for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty – including issuing grossly irresponsible nuclear rhetoric, undermining security assurances by flouting the Budapest Memorandum, and recklessly endangering the safety of Europe's largest nuclear power plant – Russia alone blocked the adoption by consensus of a final document at the Tenth Review Conference in August.

Russia also tried – and failed – to airbrush from the record the criticisms it faced at the Conference on Disarmament this year.

Russia has attempted to exploit the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention by deliberately misrepresenting peaceful public health cooperation between the United States and Ukraine as a biological weapons programme. The Formal Consultative Meeting convened under Article V last month demonstrated that there is no merit in Russia's allegations. Such disinformation risks undermining scientific and technical cooperation between States for peaceful

purposes under Article X.

Russia has also made baseless allegations about Ukraine in the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. Russia and its ally, the Assad regime in Syria, continue to impugn the expert, impartial and evidence-based work of the Technical Secretariat.

Consistent reports of Russia's use of anti-personnel mines and victim-activated booby traps calls into question its compliance with its obligations under Amended Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. The United Kingdom, as President of the Tenth Meeting of States Parties of the Convention on Cluster Munitions, expressed its grave concern at Russia's repeated use of cluster munitions.

Moreover, Russia has resorted to desperate procedural manoeuvres to curtail any discussion of its war, or of the means and methods by which it is pursuing it. Russia repeatedly attempts to rewrite history to justify the unjustifiable. It portrays itself as the victim, when it is the aggressor. It blames everyone but itself for the consequences of its own choices. Try as it might, though, Russia cannot hide from the revulsion the world feels at its actions.

Mr Chair

We cannot let Russia's aggression distract our attention from the many other challenges the world faces.

We reiterate that Iran must never develop a nuclear weapon. We regret that Iran has chosen not to seize the opportunity to restore the JCPOA and instead continues to escalate its nuclear programme. We urge Iran to return to full implementation of the JCPOA and to urgently provide credible answers to the International Atomic Energy Agency's separate investigations to fulfil Iran's legally binding safeguards obligations.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea launched an unprecedented number of ballistic missiles in 2022. It has also restored its nuclear test site. Any nuclear test must merit a swift and robust response from the international community. These programmes continue to threaten international peace, the stability of the Korean Peninsula and the integrity of the NPT, and violate unanimously adopted Security Council Resolutions. We call on all Member

States to condemn these provocations, and urge the DPRK to take concrete steps towards denuclearisation in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner.

Syria's non-compliance with its chemical weapons obligations must be resolved, in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention and UN Security Council Resolution 2118.

More generally, the illicit and uncontrolled proliferation of conventional arms contributes to instability, terrorism, and organised crime and causes untold death and devastation.

We are concerned by continuing efforts by some States to undermine and discredit Multilateral Arms Control Regimes, which are a critical part of the non-proliferation system, and facilitate exports and technology transfer around the world.

And States' consistent concern that information and communication technologies can be used for purposes that are inconsistent with international peace and security is now a reality.

The world must stand together to promote the application and observance of International Humanitarian Law both in the physical and virtual worlds, and in outer space.

Mr Chair

Notwithstanding these dark clouds, there are some rays of light. The fact that every country bar one was prepared to join consensus on the draft final document at the NPT Review Conference was an expression of their determination to uphold the centrality of the NPT. And we welcome the decision to establish a working group on strengthening the review process.

We warmly congratulate President Gustavo Zlauvinen and the whole bureau for their superb efforts. We will continue to work in this constructive spirit in the new cycle.

The Ninth BTWC Review Conference at the end of November is a vital opportunity to strengthen this important regime, including through proposals for a science and technology review process, operationalising Article VII, and more agile decision-making. To keep the Convention fit for future challenges, we also support the proposal for an Experts Working Group to study the key issues and identify steps to strengthen implementation of the Convention in all aspects.

We also welcome the progress made by the Open-Ended Working Group on reducing threats to space systems through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours, thereby preventing an arms race in outer space and maintaining the use of space for peaceful purposes. This task is increasingly urgent. Space systems underpin life in the 21st Century, and are vital for the functioning of the global economy, for the mitigation of the climate and humanitarian crises we face, and for ensuring defence and security. Disruption or damage to these systems could have far reaching consequences, including conflict.

One of our key concerns is the destructive testing of direct ascent anti-satellite missiles. Such tests generate significant debris and puts continued use of space at risk, as well as being potentially destabilising. I am therefore pleased to announce that the United Kingdom has joined others in committing not to carry out destructive direct-ascent anti-satellite missile tests. We encourage others to do the same, especially those countries with such capabilities.

Mr Chair

We must seize on these opportunities. In the face of growing global instability, the international security, non-proliferation and disarmament system has never been so important. Instead of undermining it, in this Committee or elsewhere, now is the time for the

UN membership to work together to protect and strengthen it. It is in all our interests to do so.