

# UN General Assembly 74th session: UK national statement in first committee general debate

The United Kingdom aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union. Allow me to make some further remarks in a national capacity.

Mr Chair

2019 has been an important year for disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation. It marks the centenary of multilateral disarmament diplomacy under the auspices first of the League of Nations, and latterly of the United Nations. It is also 40 years since two key elements of the multilateral disarmament machinery – the Conference on Disarmament and the UN Disarmament Commission – began their work, following the landmark decision of the First Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament in 1978.

We also celebrate 20 years since the entry into force of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention and look forward to an important Review Conference in Oslo next month. Next year, as we all know, we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the entry into force of the cornerstone of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The UK has played a central, constructive and active role in this multilateral architecture from the very beginning, and continues to do so today.

This year, in particular, as President of the Conference on Disarmament, the UK tabled a draft Decision that would have taken forward the important work of the 2018 Subsidiary Bodies and helped move the Conference on Disarmament closer to developing negotiating mandates on its four core agenda items. The Decision had strong support from across the membership but was blocked by a small number of States. We will continue our efforts to get the Conference on Disarmament back to work in 2020.

We will continue to work with any and all other interested States to find ways of strengthening the multilateral disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation machinery we have so painstakingly built together over the last century, so that it remains an essential part of the international rules based system for the next generations.

As an important element of this, consistent with its role as a champion of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, the UK also remains committed to promoting the meaningful representation of women in disarmament and arms control processes, at all stages in the process, and particularly in leadership roles.

Mr Chair

This architecture can only really fulfil its function, though, if it is fully, effectively, transparently and verifiably implemented. Full compliance with all obligations is essential to build trust and confidence and to allow further meaningful steps to be taken. Unfortunately, that central tenet of multilateral diplomacy is under attack.

Russia's responsibility for the collapse of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty demonstrates its disregard for arms control agreements and its increasingly dangerous and destabilising activity around Europe. The missiles Russia has secretly developed and deployed in violation of the INF are mobile and hard to detect. They can reach European cities with little or no warning and thus reduce the threshold for nuclear use. Russia's repeated denials and attempts to distort the facts through a concerted disinformation campaign on this and other issues are a threat to diplomacy and one we must stand firmly against.

The Syrian regime has used chemical weapons in direct contravention of the Chemical Weapons Convention, representing a clear threat to global peace and security. We cannot leave these direct assaults on international norms unchallenged. This is why the UK supports the work of the Investigation and Identification Team established by the OPCW to identify the perpetrators who use chemical weapons. This is an important step to ensure accountability, deter future attacks and thereby prevent further weakening of the norm. It builds upon the Decision reached in The Hague in June last year and demonstrates the international community's commitment to reinforcing chemical weapons controls.

The DPRK have illegally developed a nuclear weapons programme and proliferated arms globally. The UK welcomes discussions between the US and the DPRK but maintains the view that sanctions need to remain strictly implemented until concrete steps toward complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation are taken. We are willing to lend our expertise to aid in the denuclearisation process.

We continue to support the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and call on Iran to fully implement its commitments. We are deeply concerned by Iran's reductions in compliance and urge them to recommit to the deal. The system of IAEA inspections which underpins Iran's commitment to enhanced verification and inspections is one of the most extensive and robust in the history of international nuclear accords, and Iran must continue to facilitate all Agency access and information requests. We fully support the Agency's crucial independent, technical monitoring and reporting activities.

We also register our concern about Iran's wider missile programmes, which pose a threat to European security and are destabilising for the region, and call upon Iran to adhere to the restrictions on missile development and proliferation in UNSCRs 2231 and 2216.

Mr Chair

Let me say a few words now about the UK's main priorities for our work in the coming weeks.

First, we will continue to support the strengthening of the nuclear non-proliferation framework and to prepare for a successful outcome of the NPT Review Conference in 2020. The UK reiterates its strong support for the NPT and the step-by-step approach towards nuclear disarmament. We will look to remind the international community that the NPT continues to be an effective and vital part of the international security architecture; and to highlight the UK's own strong track record promoting disarmament, non-proliferation, and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, as a responsible Nuclear Weapon State.

Second, we will also play an active part in discussions on Outer Space. Across space systems, it is necessary to consider how communications, intent and behaviour can support a safe space environment. We encourage nations to work with us to develop a new concept that addresses the challenges in space as it is today, rather than the outdated notions of thirty years ago.

The UK will make more detailed statements on these and the other important issues on the Committee's agenda during the thematic debate.

Mr Chair, the erosion of norms against the use of weapons of mass destruction, and the proliferation of WMD and their means of delivery, threatens every member of the international community. Each and every one of us needs to step up to address the threat. It will take collective engagement to uphold the counter-proliferation and disarmament architecture. We must persevere in the face of today's challenges to safeguard global peace and security.