



United Kingdom
Mission to the
United Nations

**TENTH REVIEW CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE TREATY ON THE
NON-PROLIFERATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS**

MAIN COMMITTEE I

STATEMENT BY THE UNITED KINGDOM

H.E. Mr Aidan Liddle, Ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament

Vice Chair,

The UK is committed to pursuing negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to nuclear disarmament, and to the goal of a world without nuclear weapons. We reaffirm our unequivocal undertaking, alongside the other Nuclear Weapon States, to accomplish the total elimination of our nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament to which all States parties are committed under Article VI.

The NPT has created the framework that has enabled the significant reductions in the global stockpile of nuclear weapons. The UK is proud of its track record and contribution to the overall reductions in the global stockpile of all types of nuclear weapons. Since the end of the Cold War, the UK has approximately halved its stockpile and has the smallest arsenal of the Nuclear Weapon States. The UK dismantled our tactical and air-delivered nuclear weapons, becoming the only Nuclear Weapon State to reduce to a single platform, a single delivery system and a single design of warhead. UK nuclear weapons are not on high alert, nor are they on a “launch on warning” status. The patrol submarine operates routinely at a “notice to fire” measured in days, rather than in minutes. Since May 1994, patrol submarines’ missiles have been de-targeted.

However, we cannot escape the fact that the security environment has deteriorated significantly since 2015. The UK and its Allies face a growing number of challenges, including from major nuclear-armed states and from emerging nuclear states, some of whom are significantly increasing and diversifying their nuclear arsenals, investing in novel nuclear technologies, and developing new ‘warfighting’ nuclear systems which they are integrating into their military strategies and doctrines, and into their political rhetoric, to seek to coerce others. The increase in global competition, challenges to the multilateral order, and proliferation of potentially disruptive technologies all pose a threat to strategic stability.

As a result, it has not proved possible to further reduce the UK's nuclear weapon stockpile, as we had hoped. Instead, the UK's Integrated Review announced an increase in the limit of our stockpile from 225 warheads to no more than 260. This is a ceiling, not a target, and is not our stockpile number. While nuclear weapons exist, the UK will maintain a minimum, but also a credible, independent nuclear deterrent, to protect ourselves and our NATO allies from the most extreme threats. Maintaining the UK's nuclear deterrent capability at this level, taking into account the international environment, is fully consistent with our international legal obligations, including those under Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The role of nuclear weapons in our doctrine has not increased, and nor have our capabilities.

Vice Chair,

The Integrated Review also recommitted the UK to the long-term goal of a world without nuclear weapons. The UK considers disarmament to be a process as well as an end-state achievement, best achieved through a gradual, negotiated, step-by-step approach within existing international frameworks, in line with the security environment. The UK's vision of the path is set out in our working paper no. 35 entitled 'Getting to a world without nuclear weapons'. It reaffirms the steps we can take now, including bringing the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty into force, and commencing negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty.

We must pursue serious work on transparency, verification and irreversibility, the three principles which underpin our collective work on disarmament.

The UK is taking forward work on both technical and non-technical verification challenges. For example, the Atomic Weapons Establishment is carrying out ground-breaking research; and we participate in a range of global initiatives including the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification and Quad Nuclear Verification Partnership. We have written a working paper on the UK's verification programme and co-authored a paper with Quad colleagues.

The UK has co-authored a paper with Norway on the principle of irreversibility, how it has been understood and where further work can be taken forward. The UK will shortly commence new research in partnership with other States on how the principle of irreversibility can be applied to support disarmament. We will remain committed on this agenda by sponsoring further meetings and conferences.

The UK continues to champion transparency, both in terms of improving trust and building confidence, and to provide accountability as to the implementation of our Treaty obligations and other commitments. The UK has written a working paper on this, underlining that transparency is a fundamental principle underpinning nuclear disarmament.

The working papers that the UK and our partners have submitted include recommendations for the Review Conference. And next Wednesday, Norway and the UK will host a Side Event on Irreversibility in nuclear disarmament and next Thursday, with Quad partners, we will be hosting an event on Verification.

Finally, our 'path ahead' paper also sets out the challenges of moving from small numbers of nuclear weapons to complete and total disarmament in ways that enhance national and international security. We must address together the many complex political, military and technical issues which will need to be resolved if the States which possess nuclear weapons are to reduce and ultimately eliminate their arsenals securely, and to prevent nuclear weapons from ever re-emerging.

We stand by the commitment we made in January 2022 in the Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear Weapons States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races. We condemn Russia's unprovoked and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine launched just six weeks later and its irresponsible, unjustified use of nuclear rhetoric and signalling, which undermines the credibility of Russia's commitment to this Joint Statement and international law. We urge Russia to behave responsibly, exercise restraint and return to international nuclear norms.

We consider the reduction of strategic risks as one of our foremost responsibilities. And, the UK, alongside France and the US, has submitted a working paper on the principles and responsible practices for nuclear weapon States, which sets out the ways in which our governments are working to implement the Leaders' Statement.

The UK hopes this Review Conference can reach a common understanding on the importance of strategic risk reduction, and specific steps we can take to progress it. We stand by the P5 Process working paper, which acknowledges that risk reduction is consistent with the NPT's goals and is not a replacement for disarmament efforts.

Vice Chair,

Past Review Conferences have consistently recognised the legitimate interest of non-nuclear weapon States in receiving unequivocal security assurances from nuclear weapon States. Let me take this opportunity to reiterate that the UK will not use, or threaten to use, nuclear weapons against any Non-Nuclear Weapon State party to the NPT. This assurance does not apply to any State in material breach of their non-proliferation obligations. The UK, France and the United States, have released a joint statement reaffirming our existing national security assurances and our commitment to these.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine violates the security assurances it gave Ukraine in 1994 and undermine the credibility of its negative security assurances. This should be a matter of concern to all NPT States Parties.

Finally, Mr Chair, let me assure you and the Committee that the UK will remain at the forefront of global efforts towards a safer and more stable world, where countries with nuclear weapons are able to relinquish them in a way that enhances security for all. We will work constructively and actively at this Review Conference to make progress towards our collective goal of a world without nuclear weapons.