31 May 2016

RES 70/39 “Treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other explosive devices”

Introduction
1. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom presents its compliments to the Office for Disarmament Affairs and has the honour to provide the following in response to your recent note verbale (reference: ODA/37-2016/FMCT) requesting views on the report of the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT).

2. The UK has had a moratorium on the production of fissile material in place since 1995 and is committed to the pursuit of an international treaty that would put an end to the future production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. In line with the commitment we made in our Strategic Defence and Security Review in 2015, the UK will continue to press for successful negotiations on a FMCT in the Conference on Disarmament (CD). To succeed such a treaty must be agreed on the basis of consensus and involve all the relevant parties. Having a verifiable treaty in place would represent a major step in taking forward the objectives of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and be a significant step closer to our goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

Report
3. The UK supported the resolution to create the FMCT Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) at the UN General Assembly First Committee in 2012 and participated in the GGE discussions in Geneva. We welcome the report of the GGE and are confident this report and the deliberations which underpin it can serve as a valuable reference for states and should be a useful resource for negotiators of a future treaty.

4. We agree that the GGE has demonstrated that the various perspectives of states on a treaty should not be an obstacle to commencement of negotiation. CD/1299 and the mandate contained therein continues to provide the most suitable basis on which future negotiations can commence without further delay in the CD and, as noted in the Shannon report, would allow negotiators to raise for consideration all aspects of a treaty including its scope.

5. We commend the work of the GGE as the most thorough expert inter-governmental assessment to date of a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. Given the depth of its exchanges, the GGE has allowed for a better understanding of the potential architecture of a future treaty and has further clarified its various aspects. It also identified areas, including technical and
scientific challenges to definitions, verification and scope, or on legal and institutional matters which will have implications for future treaty negotiation.

6. We believe that technical experts are essential to the process and would encourage states to ensure their delegations include them in future deliberations and negotiations. A Group of Scientific Experts could also add valuable assistance to the negotiators.

7. We support the recommendation for members of the GGE to actively share the content and outcomes of the Group’s deliberations with the wider international community. The UK stands ready to assist.

8. The UK would also welcome the opportunity to be involved in any follow up work to clarify issues regarding the potential tools and techniques that will facilitate verification of a future treaty.

9. The start and early conclusion of negotiations on a FMCT is another essential step on any route to nuclear disarmament. This should remain a priority for all.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
United Kingdom