



UK Mission
Geneva

Conference on Disarmament
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Statement by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Mr President,

First, let me thank Assistant Secretary Ford for his presentation to us this afternoon. The UK views the CEND initiative as an important contribution to the pursuit of our shared goal of nuclear disarmament in general, and to the 2020 NPT review cycle in particular.

The debate on the extent of, or even the existence of, the link between security and disarmament is one we are all familiar with. Dag Hammarskjöld spoke in 1956 of the “shuttle traffic between improvement in the international atmosphere and disarmament. On the one hand ... disarmament is not likely to come about in an efficient, effective way short of a further improvement in the international situation. On the other hand, I do not think any single policy move will contribute more to an improvement in the international atmosphere than an agreement on even the most modest step in the direction of disarmament.”

The UK’s position on this question should be clear from the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review. It says, and I quote, “The UK’s independent nuclear deterrent will remain essential to our security today, and for as long as the global security situation demands.... Other states continue to have nuclear arsenals and there is a continuing risk of further proliferation of nuclear weapons. There is a risk that states might use their nuclear capability to threaten us, try to constrain our decision making in a crisis or sponsor nuclear terrorism. Recent changes in the international security context remind us that we cannot relax our guard.”

The SDSR also says, “We will continue to build trust and confidence between Nuclear and Non-Nuclear Weapon States, and to take tangible steps towards a safer and more stable world, where countries with nuclear weapons feel able to relinquish them.” We view the CEND initiative as a welcome contribution to that end.

My own hope is that the CEND initiative can be a way of looking at the question of security and disarmament in fresh ways. Much of our day-to-day discussion, here and in other fora, focusses on the next steps along the path to a world free of nuclear weapons. Most of us are

clear what we think they are: entry into force of the CTBT, for instance, or commencement of negotiations on an FMCT, or the establishment of a Middle East Zone free of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. Most of us also know the obstacles that are seen to be in the way to taking those steps. We have plenty of opportunities already to argue about all that; I do not think the value in the CEND initiative lies in rehashing familiar arguments.

Instead, I hope that it could help us find new approaches. Are there new angles from which we can approach the familiar problems, which might help us unlock them? If the next steps we had previously identified are blocked for the foreseeable future, are there others we have not yet considered? Are there things we could take to improve the context now – either in the general security environment, or in terms of transparency and confidence building measures that could build trust, reduce suspicion, ease tensions, and clear the obstacles to resuming the immediate steps? Open discussions about Nuclear Weapon States' doctrines and postures, for example, could reassure allies and adversaries alike that the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons remained high, and provide an insight into each other's threat perceptions and other considerations on which they base their doctrines and postures.

In particular, I hope that the CEND initiative could be an opportunity to look at disarmament through the other end of the telescope. We all talk about our shared goal of a world without nuclear weapons. But we do not tend to talk much about what that world would look like; and consequently what we might have to do, working backwards, to bring it about. By way of illustration, I offer four questions that we might usefully begin to tackle through the CEND initiative.

First: if nuclear weapons are essential for security now, what would guarantee security in world in which they had been given up? How would a world without nuclear weapons be different from the world that persisted in the decades before their invention, when world wars fought almost exclusively with conventional weapons claimed tens of millions of lives around the globe? If we can reach a common understanding of the military and security environment required to maintain peace and stability in a nuclear weapon free world, with undiminished, and preferably enhanced, security for all, we could start to map out the complimentary steps required to reach it along with the reduction and elimination of nuclear weapons.

Second: how would we ensure state or non-state actors could not re-acquire nuclear weapons once they had been given up by everyone else? How would we respond if they did? While nuclear weapons can be eliminated, the science behind them cannot be unlearned, nor the technology to build them forgotten. The possession of that knowledge and set of capabilities could lead to States positioning themselves as virtual nuclear

possessor States, which would be deeply destabilising and lead to constant concern over a return to nuclear weapons. Is the current safeguards system, with the Additional Protocol at its pinnacle, sufficient to guarantee that a nuclear weapons-free world would stay that way? Would we need to find new ways of managing the nuclear fuel cycle? How could that be achieved in a non-discriminatory manner without impacting the significant benefits of the peaceful uses of nuclear technology? Of course work on nuclear disarmament verification is already underway, including through the International Partnership that Dr Ford referred to, is an important contribution to nuclear disarmament; but thinking through what techniques and structures would need to be in place to manage a world without nuclear weapons is crucial to efforts to bring it about.

Third: working backwards, how would we prepare ourselves to take that final step to the elimination of nuclear weapons? It has been suggested that one of the key problems in nuclear disarmament is how stability and security are maintained at low numbers, and how to get quickly from low numbers to zero. The proliferation risks could be even greater at that stage than they are at the current levels, given the marginal benefits to be accrued; verification and safeguards would be correspondingly even more critical.

Fourth, and finally: based on a better understanding of the nuclear weapons free world we are trying to create, what are the confidence building and risk reducing steps we can take today to start to make that a reality?

This is not to say that all these questions have to be answered as a precondition to nuclear disarmament. They are difficult, and inevitably our answers to them will evolve as we move along the path. But we cannot duck them, if we are serious about the total elimination of nuclear weapons. And the very discussion is part of creating the environment for nuclear disarmament. It should be clear, too, that these are questions that all States, not just Nuclear Weapon States, have a role in helping to answer.

Mr President

The UK welcomes the CEND initiative and looks forward to contributing to it. It is a real opportunity for constructive, collaborative discussions about these intractable problems. No other forum currently exists where discussions can take place, and so the CEWG proposed by the US would, in our view, be a valuable addition to the disarmament landscape. I hope today's discussion in the Conference on Disarmament can be a constructive contribution to establishing it.

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