



UK Mission
Geneva

Conference on Disarmament

Plenary Meeting: Opening Session

STATEMENT BY THE UNITED KINGDOM

H.E. Mr Aidan Liddle, Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament
Geneva, 31 January 2023

Mr President

I begin by wishing you and all colleagues a happy, prosperous and peaceful New Year, and by congratulating you on your assumption of this important office. You can of course count on the full support of my delegation as you discharge your duties. Let me also welcome the distinguished Ambassador of Colombia, and all the new colleagues who have joined our number at the start of this session. I would also like to thank our Secretary-General for her remarks at the start of our plenary meeting on Thursday and for the constant support she and her team provide us.

I take the floor to offer a few brief reflections at the beginning of our new session.

As we saw all too clearly last year, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its subsequent rhetoric and actions have put the disarmament and arms control architecture under unprecedented strain, both in substance and process. Having already vetoed the final document of the 10th NPT Review Conference and abused the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention to advance its disinformation, Russia's behaviour in this forum last year caused even further damage to its credibility as the world's single multilateral disarmament negotiating body.

Like many others who have spoken so far in this session, I want to reiterate the United Kingdom's ongoing and unwavering support for Ukraine as it fights for its political independence, its territorial integrity, and for the Charter of the United Nations, in the face of Russia's brutal and illegal war of aggression. If we continue to value that Charter and the international system that is founded upon it, we can do no other; and we will do so for as long as it takes.

We also continue to face many other challenges, including those posed by the nuclear programmes of Iran and the DPRK, and by Syria's continued non-compliance with its obligations regarding chemical weapons.

Even if it is hard to see a way through against this background, there will come a day when arms control and disarmament once again take their place at the centre of efforts to ensure international peace and security. The United Kingdom remains steadfast in its commitment to bringing that day closer, and to ensuring we are ready to seize the opportunity when it comes. To that end, we will continue to work with any interested partners in our pursuit of practical approaches to achieving and maintaining a world without nuclear weapons, with a focus on transparency, irreversibility and verifiability. In the meantime, we will continue to live up to our nuclear responsibilities and promote risk reduction and confidence building measures.

In this regard, our priority in this body remains the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty; we continue to see no reason why negotiations should not begin immediately, and to be convinced that all outstanding issues, including the question of the scope of the treaty, can be addressed during the course of negotiations. We also stand ready to continue work on the other nuclear items on our agenda, to build mutual understanding and to continue to try to reconcile the divergent positions that exist among us, with a view to future negotiations. We look forward to the opportunity to do that on nuclear weapon-free zones this afternoon, and on negative security assurances next week.

My delegation also continues to place a high priority on our work on outer space security. The deliberations of the UN Open-Ended Working Group on reducing space threats through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours has underlined the urgent need for a fresh approach to the problem of preventing an arms race in outer space; one which is inclusive both in terms of its scope and its membership; one which takes account of the security interests of all States, space-faring or not; and one which is based on a clear assessment of the threats to space security as they are today. Many proposals are emerging from that process which would contribute greatly to international peace and security. In particular, the UK has joined several other States in committing not to conduct destructive direct-ascent anti-satellite missile tests, and urges those who have not yet done so to make similar commitments. Building on the work of Subsidiary Body 3 last year, this Conference also has a key role to play in this new approach to an old, but increasingly urgent problem.

Mr President, we look forward to proposals from you and the rest of the P6 on how we might best structure our work this year. We will support any approach that provides us with the appropriate space for sober reflection both on the challenges we face and on the role and effective functioning of this Conference in addressing them. You and your successors in the office of President can of course rely on my delegation's full and active cooperation.

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