

**United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland welcomes the opportunity to respond to General Assembly resolution 79/240 on a Group of Scientific and Technical Experts on Nuclear Disarmament Verification (GSTE-NDV).

As we have set out previously, the United Kingdom recognizes the importance of developing and strengthening practical and effective nuclear disarmament verification measures. Achieving a world without nuclear weapons will not be possible without effective verification. States will require a high level of assurance of the compliance of others to reduce and eliminate nuclear weapons. Verification is the established way States can gain such assurance. To gain maximum confidence from verification it is important that States understand the measures being implemented. Involving both nuclear and non-nuclear-weapon States in developing verification measures will help to ensure that all States have confidence that obligations under future disarmament treaties are being met.

It will take time and effort to reach a world without nuclear weapons. Robust and effective technical verification measures will need to be ready to be applied when such time comes. In this way, negotiators of future disarmament treaties will have the required verification options available, to ensure such treaties create the confidence required to progress disarmament. To enable this to be possible in the future, verification measures should be developed now. While verification is not an aim in itself, work on developing and strengthening verification measures will be a necessary part of ensuring a world without nuclear weapons is achievable.

Furthermore, effective verification measures will be required to maintain a world without nuclear weapons. When such time comes, former possessor States will likely still have significant infrastructure and capabilities associated with their former programmes, and ensuring such facilities and capabilities are re-purposed or eliminated will take time. The assurance that verification can provide will be vital in establishing confidence that all States are maintaining their obligations under future disarmament agreements. Further thought will also be required to understand if current safeguards measures will be practicable or sufficient, when applied in the long term to all States, to provide the confidence required in maintaining a world without nuclear weapons. Without such verification States will not be able to be fully assured of their security and the pressure to proliferate and develop nuclear weapons again may be present.

## **Views of the United Kingdom on the establishment of a Group of Scientific and Technical Experts on Nuclear Disarmament Verification within the United Nations**

### **Merits**

The United Kingdom has been a very strong supporter of work on verification and has been undertaking scientific and technical work on verification for over 25 years. It is clear to the United Kingdom that future nuclear disarmament arrangements will need to be underpinned by effective verification to ensure its long term sustainability, both in reaching and then maintaining nuclear disarmament. The merits for undertaking such work are therefore two fold: to make sure States are prepared for future negotiations on disarmament and its verification arrangements; to ensure the tools and technologies exist such that verification can be as effective and sustainable as possible. When we talk about being effective, we are including the need for producing high confidence that States are fulfilling their obligations, as well as in protecting proliferative information.

The United Kingdom also believes the more States that get involved with work on disarmament verification, the better prepared all States would be for future negotiations, and the more effective the relevant tools and technologies will be. This is why we first engaged with our Norway as a non-nuclear-weapon State (NNWS) on the science and technical issues of nuclear disarmament verification in 2007, and why we continue to work in a range of technical initiatives including the QUAD (with the US, Norway and Sweden), International Partnership on Nuclear Disarmament Verification (IPNDV), and actively participated in the two UN Groups of Government Experts (GGEs) founded under UNGA resolutions 71/67 and 74/50. We therefore see considerable merit at this time of this work being considered under the auspices of a United Nations group of science and technical experts, so all States can benefit from and contribute to this vital work.

It is important to say at this point, that like any technical and scientific endeavor, there is no specific end point to research, the more that is done the better the tools and technologies will be. Importantly, whilst we are concerned that there are potential gaps in technologies that exist today, verification (or a lack of tools) should never be used as an excuse for not progressing disarmament. If there is political will, a technical solution can be found, but the more that has been done on verification the easier, more effective, efficient and sustainable that solution will become. A United Nations group of science and technical experts will ensure the views of all States are better reflected in directing the focus of this work into the areas of maximum benefit to achieve these aims.

## Objectives

The United Kingdom believes a GSTE could facilitate achieving the following objectives:

- 1) To prepare States for future negotiations on disarmament and verification arrangements.
- 2) To progress the scientific and technical aspects of verification arrangements including the required tools, technologies and methodologies.

It is also clear that States that wish to see practical progress on disarmament and disarmament verification, have different technical capacities or background knowledge and experience. So this leads to a key objective of a GSTE:

- 3) To enable all States to be involved with work on disarmament verification.

The level of involvement should also be the choice of the States involved, from those who wish to simply understand and learn the lessons of work being undertaken by others, to those wishing to take part in the technical work perhaps including starting their own national efforts. This points to further objectives of a GSTE:

- 4) To review and disseminate the work being undertaken by others in the field of disarmament verification
- 5) To identify the most valuable work that could be undertaken by States
- 6) To assist States in technical capacity building

By bringing States together in a GSTE, this should greatly increase the efficiency of international work on verification. This should help avoid significant overlaps in work being undertaken, allow States to contribute in one area of such work (a particular technology perhaps), whilst also being able to learn and benefit from wider work being undertaken by others.

- 7) To enable co-ordination of efforts between States

## Mandate

The United Kingdom believes a clear mandate for the group with specific question to answer will best help the group meet its objectives.

The United Kingdom believes that among the activities and deliverables that the group of governmental experts can reasonably achieve in the timescale set for its deliberations, it should:

- 1) Identify the verification challenges associated with achieving and with maintaining a world without nuclear weapons;
- 2) Review the verification work undertaken to date;
- 3) Identify key lessons learned and unresolved issues;
- 4) Identify and report on how such issues could be addressed;
- 5) Address how to encourage and enable more States to undertake efforts in developing and strengthening nuclear disarmament verification measures, including through capacity building measures.

The United Kingdom believes the mandate should also stipulate a focus of the work on the reduction and elimination of nuclear weapons and their associated infrastructure. The group should not duplicate work on verification already well understood by the IAEA on verification of nuclear materials and their production facilities. While we do not know what precise verification will be required in all future disarmament treaties, that disarmament must include the reduction and elimination of nuclear weapons and the ability of a State to produce and maintain them is clear.

The above 5 points should therefore focus on elements of verification that assist in building confidence in the following:

- 1) The presence or absence of nuclear weapons at a given location;
- 2) The dismantlement of nuclear weapons;
- 3) The removal of proliferative characteristics from nuclear materials (such that it can be placed in safeguards);
- 4) Storage of nuclear weapons and components awaiting dismantlement or disposal;
- 5) The disposal or conversion of non-nuclear components;
- 6) The monitoring, conversion or elimination of nuclear weapons related infrastructure and facilities;

With all of the above there needs to be a focus on the protection of proliferation sensitive information, as well as health, safety and security. While delivery vehicles for nuclear weapons should not be the focus of the group, consideration will have to be given to how declarations on nuclear weapons on delivery vehicles are verified and how confidence in absence from similar delivery vehicles is assured.

Consideration should also be given to how confidence is gained from verification over the course of a treaty. The group should therefore consider verification activities which might provide confidence not only over declarations and dismantlement of individual nuclear weapons, but more importantly over an entire nuclear weapons programme over a period of many years.

## Modalities

The United Kingdom believes the modalities for the group should be constructed to best facilitate the group to meet their objectives. This will include:

- 1) Geographical diversity and gender balance, to ensure all points of view are included;
- 2) To meet in person at least annually but to undertake work intersessionally to maximise time and resources;
- 3) As the group is a deliberative body and not mandated to negotiate or make decisions, to report annually to the UNGA or UNDC;
- 4) Produce reports reflecting opinions of its experts rather than by consensus;
- 5) To have representatives of both States which both possess and do not possess nuclear weapons, and to be co-chaired by a member from each;
- 6) To have diversity in scientific and technical expertise, including those with expertise in non-nuclear verification and inspection matters, nuclear or explosive health, safety and regulation, sensitive or military facility management as well as nuclear or explosive science and technology. Re-enforcing that all States have experts with experience in relevant fields that would add value to a GSTE on NDV, and that the advantage of a UN GSTE is that individual States do not have to find expertise in all relevant fields to significantly contribute or benefit from it.

The United Kingdom also believes that there are activities the GSTE should not undertake, and that would be outside of its mandate:

- 1) Mandate work to be done by member States – as part of the point of work on verification is to build capacity and understanding for future negotiations, States must be free to choose how they participate and on what topics they work.
- 2) Mandate specific tools or technologies – exactly what verification tools and technologies are eventually used in future treaties must be up to those States in the negotiations. The GSTE can provide helpful advice and technical guidance, but it cannot make decisions for States.
- 3) Address questions of policy – the GSTE should address questions of science and technology, independent of views on how or when disarmament should take place.
- 4) Be fixed to a specific Treaty (current or future) – work on verification should be usable by any States in any agreement where it would be beneficial.
- 5) Force States to join – a GSTE should be open to all, but it should not be mandatory to take part.
- 6) Undertake all of the technical work itself – given this would require laboratory space and experiments, field exercises, the requirement for State programmes will remain.