France thanks the United Nations Secretary-General for allowing it to submit its views for review, in accordance with resolution 78/239 “Nuclear disarmament verification” adopted by the General Assembly on 22 December 2023.

France supported United Nations General Assembly resolution 78/239 which set up a Group of Governmental Experts as it believes that dialogue among nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States on nuclear disarmament verification helps to create a common culture and build trust, which is essential to arms control and disarmament and vital to strategic stability.

**France supports the work and discussions underway on nuclear disarmament verification.** First, this is an essential step towards a realistic, gradual disarmament, with a view to the total elimination of nuclear weapons. This work and these discussions, in different formats, help share various perspectives, with a view to building a common assessment of the issues, a shared understanding of the principles and consensus on the technical guidance which could be mobilized within the framework of a future treaty, when security conditions make this a possibility. Then, this work and these discussions will enable knowledge to be obtained which will be essential to negotiate a treaty, agreement or arrangement which includes verification provisions.

1. **On conceptual issues relating to nuclear disarmament verification**

An effective and efficient verification regime, whether it be bilateral or multilateral, is essential to ensure the credibility and reliability of arms control or disarmament instruments, including for nuclear disarmament. The regime must allow all parties to a given instrument to gain the necessary confidence that the respective commitments made will be implemented. In the nuclear field, a credible verification procedure, as part of a nuclear disarmament treaty (understood as the elimination of a specific number of warheads) aims to ensure that the parties to the treaty have a sufficient level of confidence that the relevant nuclear weapons will effectively be dismantled. This objective can be served in many ways, which much be adapted to the context and are negotiated and defined by the relevant treaty, agreement or arrangement. As noted in the Final Document of the First Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly, “adequate measures of verification satisfactory to the States concerned” must be set out and adapted in each relevant instrument.

While it is essential to develop effective and efficient nuclear verification capabilities, this will not be enough to achieve a nuclear-free world. Developments in the security context underlie all nuclear disarmament efforts, as part of a phased approach recommended by Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

1.1 - A nuclear disarmament verification regime cannot be implemented *in abstracto*, and must adhere to a specific disarmament treaty, agreement or arrangement and be adapted to each situation. Thus the objective, the perimeter of nuclear disarmament verification depends solely on the scope referred to by the concluded treaty, agreement or arrangement. In the absence of such a treaty, agreement or arrangement, it is not appropriate to predefine generic objectives or perimeters for nuclear disarmament verification or to speculate on their format.
Work on nuclear disarmament verification based on scenarios can be useful to identify the specifics of each stage of disarmament and highlight that needs vary depending on whether the aim is to reduce and limit arsenals, or to achieve or maintain a nuclear-free world, and that the level of guarantees also varies with the context. However, France believes that these scenarios must not result in a standardized approach to nuclear disarmament verification, which ultimately can only be based on a treaty, agreement or arrangement.

In this context and following the same reasoning, we believe that discussions on the possible role of the IAEA, which currently has no mandate to take part in nuclear disarmament verification, are premature. Verification of a nuclear disarmament treaty could only be carried out by the States Parties to that treaty, agreement or arrangement, while guaranteeing compliance with non-proliferation imperatives.

1.2 - Essentially, France believes that the scope of nuclear disarmament verification covers only nuclear warhead dismantlement, i.e. separating fissile material and high-intensity explosives, and not the entire life cycle of a weapon. It is this procedure which guarantees that a nuclear weapon can no longer be used. Safeguarding nuclear material and treating non-nuclear material and related materials is thus not central to the concept of nuclear disarmament. This approach brings a sense of pragmatism and realism to nuclear disarmament verification.

Lessons can be learnt from discussions or negotiations on nuclear disarmament or arms control treaties to enable progress in nuclear disarmament verification, but the regimes established by former instruments cannot be identically reproduced (because a future regime would be defined within the framework of a specific treaty, agreement or arrangement). For example, France was actively involved in discussions on the verification of a Treaty Banning the Production of Fissile Material for Nuclear Weapons or Other Nuclear Explosive Devices (FMCT) as part of a Group of Governmental Experts which convened in 2014 and 2015, and within the framework of a high-level expert preparatory group in 2017 and 2018. Based on these past experiences, it is clear that the issue is not the verification of declared fissile material (already conducted by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)), nor is it to verify that fissile material is not being produced (this is the purpose of a future FMCT, which France actively promotes in all disarmament forums).

However, the scope of nuclear disarmament verification could be broadened provided that the relevant treaty, agreement or arrangement stipulates as such. But in the absence of a definitive treaty, agreement or arrangement to draw upon, only nuclear warhead dismantlement can currently be covered when generically discussing nuclear disarmament verification.

1.3. All initiatives in the area of nuclear disarmament verification must comply with non-proliferation obligations pursuant to Articles I and II of the NPT. They must also be conducted in line with the principle of undiminished security for all, which is recognized as part of the NPT review process and must take account of the safety and security obligations of nuclear-weapon States as well as the principle to protect confidential State information. Technologies and procedures which could be mobilized within the framework of nuclear disarmament verification must take into account and fully respond to all security, safety and non-proliferation challenges.

1.4 Political commitments and transparency are essential to build Parties’ confidence in the effectiveness of disarmament measures. France has irreversibly dismantled its nuclear-weapon fissile material production facilities in Pierrelatte and Marcoule. France is the only State to have unilaterally dismantled its ground-to-ground nuclear component. France has also decided to irreversibly shut its Pacific Nuclear Test Centre and has opened it up to an international expert mission to assess the impact of French tests on the environment. These commitments required constant implementation work and
cost several billion euros. These actions have been made public and supported by related transparency measures, including visits by representatives from both nuclear and non-nuclear weapon States to the dismantled sites.

In order to provide unprecedented transparency, France is the only nuclear-weapon State to have opened up its former nuclear weapon fissile production facilities to the international community, via three visits to the Pierrelatte and Marcoule sites in 2008, 2009 and 2020. Furthermore, visits to the Luxeuil and Albion Plateau sites were organized in 2005 and 2015. Although these visits were not verification activities per se, they help establish a climate of mutual trust among the parties with regard to the effective dismantling of certain key facilities in the French military nuclear complex.

While there is a clear link between verification and transparency, as these two concepts go hand-in-hand and are mutually supportive, there is no such link between verification and irreversibility. The irreversibility of nuclear disarmament is not an objective per se of nuclear disarmament verification, unless that is the explicit purpose of the relevant treaty, agreement or arrangement.

2. On capacity-building

France supports capacity-building and believes that the acquisition of both technical and procedural expertise on nuclear disarmament verification is important to enable verification to be built on solid foundations. It also generates interest from the international community on a core aspect of nuclear disarmament, thus promoting further progress. Capacity-building must take place by taking account of non-proliferation and confidentiality requirements, ensuring equal gender representation in order to create a gender-balanced pool of experts and keeping in mind that in the absence of a treaty, agreement or arrangement, the methods, procedures and techniques employed within this framework cannot be automatically implemented, and are mainly for research purposes.

Prior to negotiations on a nuclear disarmament treaty, agreement or arrangement, it is useful to conduct practical exercises simulating real verification conditions and procedures to verify that a weapon has indeed been dismantled. These exercises could harmonize knowledge, confirm or reject concepts and technologies and identify difficulties and potential obstacles to their full implementation. When the strategic context allows, these exercises can provide valuable experience in order to negotiate treaties, agreements and arrangements on nuclear disarmament, but in no way are they a prescribed standard. It will be the responsibility of the parties to the said treaty, agreement or arrangement to choose for themselves the verification terms to be applied, and these terms cannot be imposed on them.

To that end, France participates in the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification (IPNDV), which convenes over 20 States to discuss technical issues regarding nuclear disarmament verification. This partnership, which brings together both nuclear and non-nuclear weapon States, aims to improve the understanding of the technical challenges and skills necessary for nuclear disarmament verification. As part of this work, the French-German NuDiVe exercises held in 2019 and 2022 focused on how to dismantle a (fictitious) nuclear warhead, thus enabling certain theories discussed within the IPNDV to be discussed. The purpose of these exercises was to test specifically-selected procedures and technologies, in order to ensure that the warhead had indeed been dismantled and that no fissile material had been diverted during the operation. The exercises were conducted in collaboration with both nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear weapon States.

The idea of a trust fund to support and step up these exercises merits closer consideration so that the scope of actions and programmes eligible for financial support can be clearly defined.

3. On setting up a Group of Scientific and Technical Experts
A group of scientific and technical experts on nuclear disarmament verification would help deepen the technical aspects of nuclear disarmament verification and would help capacity-building efforts. At this stage of discussions, and given the lack of consensus on the relevance of establishing such a group, the aim would be to reach agreement on a specific objective for this group of experts and to determine its perimeter. France’s preference would be to set up such a group within the framework of the Conference on Disarmament. In France’s view, such a group has no role to play in negotiating a nuclear disarmament treaty and under no circumstances would negotiations stem from discussions within it.

For this group to operate effectively, France believes that, via consensus, it will be essential to provide it with a clear mandate with detailed rules in order to avoid overlap with existing structures and initiatives. It could thus be useful to learn from past experiences in line with the specific features of nuclear disarmament verification, while keeping the non-proliferation and security requirements in mind throughout the work, as well as the fact that in the absence of a treaty, agreement or arrangement, the methods, procedures and techniques discussed within the group cannot be automatically implemented or imposed.