



United Kingdom
Mission to the
United Nations

MEWMDFZ Conference 2021

Opening Statement

by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

The United Kingdom remains committed to the establishment of a zone in the Middle East free from nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems, in line with the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East.

We fully recognise our responsibilities as a co-sponsor of that resolution. The UK is ready to actively support and facilitate renewed regional dialogue with all States of the region, in a format that is inclusive, balanced, consensus-based and result orientated.

In 2019, we expressed our disappointment that the UN General Assembly's Decision that led to the creation of this Conference was tabled by the Arab Group without the support of all States of the region. The Guidelines on the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones adopted by the UN Disarmament Commission in 1999 underline that such zones must be established based on arrangements freely arrived at among all the States of the region concerned. They also underline that initiatives to pursue such zones must be pursued by *all* the States of that region. These principles were reaffirmed by the 2010 NPT Review Conference's endorsement to convene a Conference in 2012. It was on this basis that, while we support the overall aims of the process, the essential conditions of inclusivity and dialogue were not met in the way the process was initiated – and thus the UK abstained on the 2018 Decision.

That said the UK took the decision to participate in the 2019 Conference as an observer. The UK was encouraged by the efforts of the Chair and most participants

to achieve a constructive spirit and outcome, which did not close the door to other States participating in the future. To make progress, there needs to be a dialogue in which all states of the region feel they can participate, and their security concerns will be heard. The 2019 Conference declared its intent to pursue a treaty 'on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at by consensus by the States of the region'. On that basis, the UK urges all relevant stakeholders, especially those here today, to make renewed, good faith consultations, with all relevant parties, in order to bring this issue back to consensus.

If this process is to be credible, it cannot be used to single out and isolate one state.

Mr President,

The UK is deeply concerned by the regional security situation today.

Syria's chemical weapons programme remains a grave concern. The fact that the Asad regime has killed hundreds of its own people with chemical weapons is beyond doubt given the eight authoritative findings of chemical weapons use by UN and OPCW independent investigations, most recently the IIT's second report in April 2021 that found that regime forces had dropped chlorine on Saraqib in February 2018. In this context, it was right that, in April, the 25th Conference of States Parties suspended some of Syria's OPCW rights and privileges until they demonstrate compliance with the Convention. Syria, like every other State Party, must exclude completely the possibility of using chemical weapons in any circumstances.

We also take this opportunity to strongly urge Syria to return to full compliance with its safeguards obligations, and cooperate with the IAEA in connection with *all* unresolved issues. Syria's long-standing non-compliance with its Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement grows ever more serious with time.

Iran's nuclear programme has never been more advanced than it is today. It is undermining regional and international security. Iran continues to take steps that are permanently and irreversibly upgrading its nuclear capabilities, including producing Highly Enriched Uranium and uranium metal. Since February 2021, Iran has significantly reduced IAEA access by withdrawing from JCPoA-agreed monitoring arrangements, and suspending its implementation of the Additional Protocol. The longer this continues, the greater the risk that the IAEA will be unable to recover lost

knowledge on Iran's nuclear programme. Despite restrictions in UNSCR 2231 against developing nuclear-capable delivery systems, Iran also continues to enhance the range and accuracy of its missile systems, including by testing ballistic missile technology via its space programme. We have returned to JCPoA talks in Vienna this week for a swift conclusion of the deal on the table. We have consistently demonstrated our commitment to the JCPoA, and to fully restoring the deal. The offer on the table is fair and comprehensive. We hope Iran will take the opportunity to do this deal now.

We are here to talk about a Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone and the security of the region. The UK's trilateral cooperation agreement with the US and Australia will be fully consistent with the three parties respective non-proliferation obligations.

We hope this Conference can make progress on 2019's discussions through constructive discussions that take into account regional security. We continue to advocate strongly for the universalisation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and call on those who have not yet ratified, to do so at their earliest opportunity. IAEA safeguards are the primary tool for preventing proliferation; an Additional Protocol remains the gold standard of safeguards agreements and we encourage all states to meet this standard. We also call on all Annex II states to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which is a vital part of the international security architecture. We call on states who have not yet done so to ratify and fully implement the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological and Toxins Weapon Convention; and for all states to adhere to the MTCR guidelines and principles on ballistic missiles, which restrict the proliferation of systems and associated technology, for the delivery of WMD. Such ratifications would bring greater confidence to the region and support discussions about a Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone.

Mr President,

The UK looks forward to engaging in constructive discussions with all stakeholders over the next few days. It remains important to ensure that any outcomes of this Conference do not preclude other relevant stakeholders from joining this process at a later stage. We also hope that this process will contribute towards setting the

atmosphere for a successful NPT Review Conference in January next year that reaffirms the NPT as the irreplaceable foundation and framework for our common efforts on disarmament, non-proliferation and the peaceful uses of nuclear technology.