

**Middle East Conference
13-18 November 2023**

Remarks

Mr President,

On behalf of the United Kingdom, I congratulate you on your nomination as President of this Conference, and express our thanks to the countries of the Middle East for the invitation to observe.

The UK remains committed to the implementation of a zone free from nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, as a co-sponsor of the 1995 Resolution. Like many of you have said, the 1999 UN Disarmament Guidelines for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon free zone provide a strong basis for the Middle East region to follow.

These guidelines emphasise inclusivity and consent: the establishment of a nuclear weapon free zone should be pursued by all States of that region, and be built on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region concerned. Because of these principles, the United Kingdom expressed concerns with how this process was initiated and abstained on the 2018 Decision. We continue to hold the view that to make progress, all states of the region must feel able to participate meaningfully and so this process should not be used to isolate any single state.

I also wish to emphasise that we welcome the constructive atmosphere fostered by many participants at this Conference, including efforts to leave the door open to the potential participation of other states in future. This constructive spirit was positively reflected in the 2022 NPT Review Conference deliberations on the Middle East issue, and while we were unable to achieve a consensus outcome, the United Kingdom looks forward to continuing to work with partners in the 2026 Review Cycle.

We advocate strongly for universalisation of the NPT and continue to call on all states who have not yet ratified, to do so at their earliest opportunity.

Nuclear non-proliferation, and effective verification of compliance, provide the security and confidence that allow peaceful nuclear cooperation to flourish. All states have the right to the peaceful uses of nuclear science and technology, which brings benefits in energy, healthcare, agriculture, medicine and more.

We believe that the IAEA Additional Protocol offers the highest assurance of compliance. We welcome that many states here today have already brought an Additional Protocol into force and stand ready to aid any other State considering doing so. We are also willing to share our experience on nuclear security issues, including through our participation in the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism. Resolution 1540 is a key tool for preventing non-state actors from accessing all types of WMD materials and we encourage States to utilise its assistance provisions.

We also call on States who have not yet done so, to sign and ratify the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Biological and Toxins Weapon Convention, and the

Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, and we encourage adherence to the Missile Technology Control Regime Guidelines. These are essential elements of the international non-proliferation architecture, and we believe they can help provide a framework for a zone free from all weapons of mass destruction.

Serious non-proliferation challenges remain,

Iran's nuclear programme has never been more advanced than it is today, and Iran's current activities have no credible civilian justification. We call on Iran to fulfil its legal obligations and political commitments regarding nuclear non-proliferation with prompt action, including full and unconditional cooperation with the IAEA. I wish to emphasise to my Iranian colleague, that a diplomatic solution remains the best way to resolve international concerns. We are deeply concerned at the accelerating proliferation of ballistic missile technology to non-state actors in the Middle East by Iran, which has serious implications for international security.

As well as the fourth conference, this year marks ten years since Syria's ratification of the Chemical Weapons Convention, yet twenty out of the twenty-four outstanding issues opened by the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team in 2014 remain unresolved, involving undeclared research, production and weaponisation of unknown quantities of chemical weapons. We call on Syria to comply fully with the OPCW.

Colleagues,

As many of you have said, a grave crisis continues to unfold across the Middle East today. The UK condemns the appalling Hamas terrorist attacks on the 7th October and stands in solidarity with Israel. We will also continue to call on Israel to take all feasible precautions to avoid harming Palestinian civilians and to act in line with international humanitarian law. And we will continue to work closely with partners to respond to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Finally, let me say that the United Kingdom looks forward to engaging in constructive discussion with all partners over the coming days. We look forward to a productive conference and hope this process will contribute to improved stability in the Middle East, as well as to the health of the international non-proliferation regime.

Thank you.