

MEWMDFZ Conference

UK National Statement

Mr President,

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

As a co-sponsor of the 1995 resolution, the UK recognises its responsibilities and remains fully committed to a zone free of all Weapons of Mass Destruction and their delivery systems in the Middle East. Such a zone would support non-proliferation and disarmament and could make a vital contribution to regional and international security.

As we have all agreed, the creation of the Middle East WMD free zone needs to be in line with the principles and guidelines set out by the UNDC in 1999. It must be established on arrangements freely arrived at among the states of the region to ensure the zone is built on inclusivity and consent.

The UK welcomes and supports a constructive approach towards progress. All states of the region must feel able to participate meaningfully across a broad agenda, and so this process must be inclusive and reflect the interests of all countries in the region.

Mr President,

We of course need to be mindful of the backdrop against which we meet. The last time this Conference met was just weeks after the appalling atrocities committed by Hamas on 7 October last year. Since then, the world has witnessed intolerable death and destruction in Gaza, the unacceptable ongoing detention of hostages by Hamas, and a rising cycle of violence in the region.

The comments made by the Israeli Minister of Heritage last November suggesting that possible nuclear weapon use could be justified in the context of the Gaza conflict were abhorrent and contrary to the goal of regional peace and security. We welcomed the swift clarification from Israel's Prime Minister that such remarks did not reflect the position of the Israeli government.

The fighting must stop now. We need an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, all the hostages out, and more humanitarian aid in. My Foreign Secretary will chair a UN Security Council meeting today with the aim of making progress towards long-term peace in the region.

The instability of the past year highlights the importance of finding a way forward on establishing a Middle East WMD Free Zone. The UK is committed to work with partners towards realising that vision. As a path to this, we strongly advocate for the universalisation of the NPT, the IAEA Additional Protocol, the Chemical Weapons Convention, and the Biological Weapons Convention and call on all states who have not yet signed or ratified them, to do so at the earliest opportunity.

Proliferation risks could worsen with advanced conventional weapon development. We therefore also encourage adherence to the Missile Technology Control Regime Guidelines and the Wassenaar Arrangement. These regimes support counter proliferation, facilitate trade and encourage transparency.

We hope to see continued focus within the region on counter proliferation initiatives which could help provide a framework for a WMD free zone. This includes reaching consensus on mechanisms to strengthen the BTWC which we hope can be agreed at a Special Conference next year. The CWC also needs to be promoted, and consideration given to the implications of new technology on its functioning. We thank Morocco for hosting a conference on the impact of Artificial Intelligence on Implementation of the CWC last month, for which the UK was pleased to provide financial support.

Mr President,

These steps alone won't bring about a Middle East WMD Free Zone. Serious non-proliferation WMD threats exist in the region which hamper progress.

Iran's nuclear programme is more advanced than ever. Iran has continued manufacturing, installing and operating thousands of advanced centrifuges, well in excess of JCPoA limits and with irreversible knowledge gains. It has accumulated high enriched uranium for which it has no credible civilian justification. Additionally, Iran continues to ignore its legal obligations under the NPT with regards to

safeguards. Iran must provide all the information and access deemed necessary by the IAEA without further delay. We remain committed to ensuring that Iran never acquires a nuclear weapon and will use all diplomatic tools to this effect, including use of the snapback mechanism.

We are also deeply concerned about the risk that chemical weapons in the region could fall into the hands of non-state actors. Over a decade after Syria acceded to the CWC, the OPCW continues to find new issues and gaps in Syria's declaration. We call on the Assad regime, once more, to cooperate fully with the OPCW and to finally declare its full chemical weapons programme.

Mr President,

While we must do all in our power to ensure that WMDs do not proliferate, that of course does not mean that legitimate uses of nuclear power and the peaceful application of nuclear technologies should be stymied. All NPT states have the right to the peaceful use of nuclear science and technology, which brings benefits in energy, healthcare, agriculture, medicine and more. The UK is proud to support this work including through the UK and US led Sustained Dialogue on Peaceful Uses which has included initiatives in the Middle East region, most recently with the Jordanian Water Authority to identify the most useful applications of nuclear technology.

The UK looks forward to engaging in constructive discussions with all partners over the coming days. The current security environment means we all need to work harder to achieve peace and stability in the Middle East. The UK stands ready to play its role in this. Thank you.