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The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP  
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs  
King Charles St  
LONDON  
SW1A 2AH

24 March 2017

Dear Secretary of State,

### **UK's non-attendance at UN nuclear disarmament negotiations**

I am writing on behalf of the United Nations Association – UK to urge the UK to live up to its international obligations on multilateral nuclear disarmament.

Next week, negotiations begin at the UN to create a legally-binding treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons.

The UK's stated intention not to participate raises serious doubts over the UK's compliance with its international obligations, including its commitment to pursue negotiations on multilateral nuclear disarmament under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

History has shown, through prohibitions on biological and chemical weapons, antipersonnel landmines and cluster munitions, that treaties are an effective way to stigmatise, and eventually reduce the prevalence of, unacceptable and inhumane weapons technologies.

The decision of nuclear-weapon states not to participate in the upcoming UN negotiations is regrettable and could contribute to a deterioration of relations between those with nuclear weapons and those without. The UK's decision to stay away also goes against UK public opinion, with 75 per cent of UK adults believing that the Government should be represented at the negotiations, according to a recent poll by YouGov.

With little visible appetite for disarmament from nuclear-weapon states, including the UK, tensions are also damaging international cooperation on nuclear security. This can be seen in the failure of the signatories of the NPT to produce an outcome document at the 2015 Review Conference – a framework regarded by the UK as the “cornerstone” of the non-proliferation regime.

Given the dangers arising from a lack of international cooperation on nuclear security issues and the potential emergence of a new arms race between nuclear powers, principled and engaged leadership from nuclear-weapon states is sorely needed.

The UK has an important role to play on this front. Firstly, the UK should work energetically to improve relations with non-nuclear-weapon states. This includes reversing its decision not to participate in the 2017 UN nuclear disarmament negotiations and by taking other unmistakable steps to demonstrate Britain's commitment on this issue.

Secondly, the UK should take actions to help restore the health of the NPT regime, including by initiating an inclusive process to work on the 2010 64-point Action Plan and by publishing an annual report on the UK's contribution towards its implementation.

Lastly, the UK should acknowledge the negative effect that any perceived failure to honour its international obligations could have on the standing of the wider system of international laws and norms, a system upon which – according to the UK's own analysis – Britain's security and prosperity depend.

The UK has committed to a vision of a global Britain that plays a bold, new role on the world stage following its departure from the European Union. While states retain weapons capable of causing catastrophic humanitarian, environmental and societal fallout, we are all at grave risk.

The steps above not only constitute practical recommendations for a globally-minded UK to show leadership on the world stage; they would also contribute to our shared vision of a nuclear-weapon-free world.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stewart Wood', written in a cursive style.

**Stewart Wood, Lord Wood of Anfield**  
Chair, United Nations Association – UK