

(Mr. Luce, United Kingdom)

The key to an effective Convention is effective verification. The working groups made progress last year; it is my earnest hope that they will proceed much faster this session and next. No price in effort is too great to pay for agreement. The United Kingdom stands ready to do everything possible to help to advance these negotiations towards agreement. We intend to pursue vigorously in the detailed negotiations that lie ahead the points in our paper tabled last March on verification of non-production, designed to ensure that chemical weapons are not being produced after the destruction of existing stockpiles. This will be a key element in assuring international confidence in the Treaty. We shall also play our part in trying to reach agreement on verification of destruction of stockpiles, of destruction of production facilities and of permitted production of super-toxic substances for protective purposes. I hope that all delegations will adopt a positive position on these vital issues, and will present practical proposals to this end. If they do, then this Conference will be on the brink of success.

If the Convention is to convince international opinion that full compliance will be ensured, my Government believes that it must contain a combination of routine on-site inspection and the possibility of fact-finding procedures to investigate any doubt which may arise about compliance. Without such procedures, there would be no means of resolving doubt. And doubt breeds uncertainty, destroys confidence and provokes recrimination, which would in turn undermine the Convention.

To complement the other verification proposals now on the table, I am pleased to introduce today a new British Working Paper entitled "Verification and Compliance — the Challenge Element". It is generally accepted that the Convention should contain a provision for challenge by any party. The aim of the paper is to suggest how challenges could be handled effectively in order to maintain confidence in the Convention. For this purpose it would clearly be important to ensure that action, including, if necessary, on-site inspection should follow a challenge without delay. This paper is the latest in a series of initiatives which successive British governments have taken in their earnest endeavour to achieve a chemical weapons ban. In 1976 we tabled a draft Treaty. Two years ago my predecessor tabled a paper on compliance. Last year he also introduced a proposal on verification of non-production of chemical weapons. It is our hope that this latest initiative will strengthen the present basis for an agreement.

The international community has placed squarely upon this Conference the heavy responsibility to agree a convention banning chemical weapons completely. Such weapons should have no place on the face of this earth. I urge this Conference to discharge its responsibility with despatch, and to present at the earliest possible moment to the United Nations an effective Convention for signature and ratification. An achievement in this area would not only be valuable in itself but would also do much to enhance the confidence that is needed for agreement in other fields.