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(Mr. Mellor, United Kingdom)

I hope that I can begin, and carry with me everyone around this table, when I pay a particular tribute to Dr. Ian Cromartie, who is, of course, as you will all know and sadly, retiring as Head of the British delegation. It is no idle compliment to praise his efforts at this Conference over the past five years, not least his sterling work in the chemical negotiations as Chairman in 1986. He will be much missed by this Conference, and by none more than my own colleagues. The experience and expertise that Dr. Cromartie built up over the years set high standards for the rest of us. I will try to live up to those standards today, when I shall be introducing a new British initiative in the field of chemical weapons.

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(Mr. Mellor, United Kingdom)

Mr. President, I hope I am not outstaying my welcome and you will not regret your kindness in inviting me to come here, but I did want my contribution to be comprehensive, to set out the totality of our stance and to conclude with an area that I think is well known around this table, is one where we particularly want to see progress made and where we particularly feel that in the United Kingdom we might have a role to play in bringing agreement about, and so it is to chemical weapons that I turn finally and perhaps most relevantly to the concerns of the distinguished Ambassadors around this table.

Chemical weapons are, of course, the classic example of the futility of unilateral gestures. The United Kingdom gave up its chemical weapons capability in the 1950s and the United States stopped making such weapons in 1969. But it was only in April this year that the Soviet Union announced they had finally ceased production. And even if this is so, the West now faces a truly massive Soviet stockpile. Very few countries are prepared to admit their possession of chemical weapons, but the reports of the spread of such weapons are too frequent and too insistent to ignore.

I would like to pay tribute to the valuable work that has been done at this Conference. Our aim for chemical weapons is particularly ambitious. It is not to set limits. It is not to freeze existing levels. It is to abolish them completely, in an effective, verifiable, global ban. You were kind enough, Mr. President, to mention my predecessor, Timothy Renton, and since he spoke at this Conference last year we have seen encouraging progress: substantial areas of agreement on the destruction of chemical weapons and of their means of production; and acceptance of the importance of a verification