

Opening address by Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

Let me first of all welcome all of you to London, friends from every continent, from America, to Russia, from Latin America to the Middle East, Africa to the Far East, of course members from and representatives of the International Atomic Energy Agency itself.

The size and diversity of this gathering is a truly global expression of the strength of our shared ambition to secure for our world peaceful nuclear power and to reduce and remove from it the dangers of nuclear weapons.

And if I may give a special mention this morning to Baroness Williams who has advised me on many of these issues and will be known to you for the great work that she has done round the world.

In just two weeks time the eyes of the world will turn to London as the leaders of the G20 meet to rebuild our global economy. At stake will be a global new deal for our economic future, with decisions that I hope will remake the rules, not just for a global economy but for a global society. The actions that we take in these coming weeks and months will define not only the economies of our world for the future but the values of the world and the inheritance we will bequeath our children and our grandchildren.

Amidst the pressures of this global economic crisis there will be those who argue that other challenges are a distraction, that the global economy is the only concern where there is an urgency to act or the opportunity to seize an historic moment. But I think that is to profoundly misunderstand the world we are in today and the one that we together can build for tomorrow. For I believe that history will take a broader view and in due course history will tell how in the making of a new global society, and in an unprecedented set of times, we had to confront four great and interconnected challenges of our global society: the challenge yes of global financial instability; but the challenge also of climate change and energy needs; the challenge of global poverty; and of course - my subject today - global security.

Momentous challenges but challenges best addressed together. And in this world of change the task of leadership is to name the challenges, shape them and then seek to rise to them.

The nuclear question is absolutely central therefore to them. It is more than about security, vital as that is, it is more than about nuclear power and meeting the challenges of energy shortages and climate change, important as they are, it is about the values of this global society we are trying to build and it is about the very idea of progress itself, about the foundations upon which we build our common security and a sustainable future

for our planet. In short it is about what kind of world we are and what kind of world we want to be.

Taxing as these issues are, I am an optimist with faith in the future. For I believe we are witnessing, as nations come together to address the financial crisis, the power of common purpose, nations agreeing not just high aspirations but practical down to earth shared actions, governments acting quickly and collectively to take radical and perhaps even previously unthinkable measures because we know now that we must succeed together or separately we will fail.

As we learn from this experience of turning common purpose into common action in our shared global society, so I believe we can together seize this time of profound change to form for a generation, our generation, a new internationalism that is both hard-headed and progressive. It is a multilateralism built out of a commitment to the power of international cooperation and rejecting confrontation, it is founded on a belief in collaboration, not isolation, and it is driven forward by a conviction that what we achieve together will be far greater than what any of us can achieve on our own. It is this new spirit of progressive multilateralism that gives us hope that we can find within ourselves and together the moral courage and leadership I believe that the world now seeks.

Sir Michael Quinlan, who sadly died last month and for whose work we will always be grateful, argued 30 years ago that nuclear weapons cannot be disinvented. Our task now, he said, is to devise a system for living in peace and freedom where ensuring that nuclear weapons are never used either to destroy or blackmail. That pragmatism was right for the dark days of the Cold War, but I believe we can and should now aim high, that the only way to guarantee our children and our grandchildren will be free from the threat of nuclear war is to create a world in which countries can have confidence, refuse to take up nuclear weapons in the knowledge that they will never be required.

Now I know from President Obama and the new United States administration that America shares with us the ultimate ambition of a world free from nuclear weapons. And let me be clear this will be a difficult path that will be crossed in steps, not with one leap. With each step we must aim to build confidence, confidence that action to prevent proliferation is working and that states with weapons are making strides to live up to their commitments.

I believe that this is the time to act together to take the next steps in building that confidence for we are, as I think everybody here knows, at a decisive moment. We are facing the risk of a new and dangerous nuclear era of new states and perhaps even non-state nuclear weapon holders.

Once there were five nuclear powers, now there are nearly twice as many. There is a risk that there could be many more. Proliferation is our immediate concern and for that reason alone it is time to act.

And there is yet another risk - that of nuclear weapons falling into the hands of unstable or ideological-driven regimes or terrorists, groups like al Qaeda. We must all commit to prevent this from ever happening.

Now in 2005 the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference failed. We cannot afford to fail next year. So as we approach the 2010 Review Conference I want us to renew and refresh for our times the grand global bargain, the covenant of hope between nations at the heart of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. It is a bargain under which we reaffirm the rights and responsibilities for those countries which forego nuclear weapons. But it is also a bargain under which there are tough responsibilities to be discharged by nuclear weapon states, for as successor states we cannot expect to successfully exercise moral and political leadership in preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons if we ourselves do not demonstrate leadership on the question of disarmament of our weapons.

Under this bargain there is a right for all states to develop civil nuclear power, but there is a responsibility for these states to reject the deployment of nuclear weapons and their development. There is a responsibility too on nuclear weapon states to reduce their nuclear weapons. So in the coming months Britain will, working with other countries, set out a Road to 2010 Plan with detailed proposals on civil nuclear power, on disarmament and non-proliferation, on fissile material security and a role in the development of the International Atomic Energy Authority. We will be seeking the widest possible international engagement and consultation around this plan. We will also host a Recognised Nuclear Weapon State Conference on nuclear disarmament issues and on confidence building measures, including the verification of disarmament.

For in the same way as we have tried to lead in challenging old orthodoxies by eliminating conventional weapons which caused harm to civilians, such as cluster munitions, I want to pledge that Britain will be at the forefront of the international campaign to prevent nuclear proliferation and to accelerate multilateral nuclear disarmament.

Article 6 of the Non-Proliferation Treaty specifically states that countries that do possess nuclear weapons agree to divest themselves over time. No single nuclear weapon state can be expected to disarm unilaterally, but I know that people have been trying to abolish nuclear weapons almost since their invention in the 1940s. Even in the Cold War when they were central to countries' defence planning, there were efforts to reduce their spread and indeed to initiate disarmament and then the introduction of the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

In the 1980s Presidents Gorbachev and Reagan, leaders of the countries with by far the largest arsenal of nuclear weapons, discussed the abolition of their most powerful weapon. Every President of both parties in the United States since the 1960s has reaffirmed the Non-Proliferation Treaty. If no single nuclear weapon state can be expected to disarm unilaterally, neither should it, but step by step we have to transform the discussion of nuclear disarmament from one of platitudes to one of hard commitment.

We have also to help create a new international system to ensure non-nuclear states acquire the new sources of energy that they want to have.

Because whether we like it or not, we will not meet the challenges of climate change without the far wider use of civil nuclear power, but we must invest in all sources of low carbon energy, energy efficiency, renewables, carbon capture and storage and nuclear power. Given the scale of global emission reductions that are required, and the likely cost, no cost-effective low carbon technology must be off limits. The complete life cycle emissions from nuclear power, from uranium mining to waste management, are only between 2 and 6% of those from gas for every unit of electricity generated. And the International Energy Agency estimates we must build 32 nuclear reactors globally every year if we are to halve emissions by 2050.

So however we look at it we will not secure the supply of sustainable energy on which the future of our planet depends without a role for civil nuclear power. We simply cannot avoid the real and pressing challenge that presents, from the safety and security of fissile material to the handling of waste, a comprehensive multilateral strategy to allow nations safe and secure access to civil nuclear power is essential.

So this morning I want to outline the principles that must guide our progress in the months ahead, and the practical steps I believe we should consider to strengthen the global non-proliferation architecture by renewing and refreshing the global nuclear bargain for our times.

And let me be clear, we are not asking non-nuclear weapon states to refrain from proliferation while nuclear weapon states amass new weapons; we are asking them not to proliferate while nuclear weapon states take the steps to reduce their own arsenals in line with the Non-Proliferation Treaty's requirements.

I believe it is a fair and even-handed bargain that contains two central elements: that we enshrine the right for all nations to acquire civil nuclear power safely, securely and subject to proper multilateral verification, processes with tougher sanctions brought to bear on those who break the rules; and that nuclear weapon states must set out much more clearly the responsibilities that we too must discharge.

So what does that mean in practice? In the first place we must give every nation the right of access, what President Eisenhower once memorably called atoms for peace. But in doing so we must as an international community be completely confident that we are able to ensure there are appropriate mechanisms for multilateral control of the entire fuel cycle, ensuring the security of fissile material, preventing unwanted proliferation with clear, tough and immediate sanctions for those who break the rules.

Iran is a test case for this new philosophy of the right to civil nuclear power with sanction rule-breakers. And let me be unequivocal. Iran has the same absolute right to a peaceful nuclear programme - civil nuclear programme - as any other country. Indeed the UK and

the international community stand ready to help Iran achieve it, as the opening of the nuclear plant at Bushehr already shows.

But let me be equally clear that Iran's current nuclear programme is unacceptable. Iran has concealed its nuclear activities, refused to cooperate with the IAEA, flouted UN Security Council resolutions and its refusal to play by the rules leads us to view its nuclear programme as a critical proliferation threat.

Iran therefore faces a clear choice: to continue in this way and face further and tougher sanctions; or change to a UN-overseen civil nuclear energy programme that will bring the greatest benefits to its citizens. I hope that Iran will make the right choice and take advantage of the international community's willingness to negotiate, including President Obama's offer of engagement, rather than face further sanctions and regional instability.

So I urge Iran, once again, to work with us rather than against us upon this. The opportunity to do so remains on the table and the choice is Iran's to make.

For our own part in Britain we will bring forward detailed plans for the responsible future management of our stocks of fissile material, and as part of the road to the 2010 consultation we will examine how best to deal with those stocks which have accumulated. I am committed that the UK will also lead on bringing forward proposals internationally for multilateral control of the fuel cycle. We will seek an innovative partnership between industry, academia and government for further research and development to tackle the technical challenges that you know are involved in developing a proliferation-proof nuclear fuel cycle.

There are a number of proposals, as you know, that are already being considered. The UK's proposal for a nuclear fuel assurance, or uranium enrichment bond, is an important contribution to resolving this important matter. However, most of the options proposed are aimed at the front half of the fuel cycle - enrichment and fuel provision. I believe we should now go further in considering all the options, including those that can address the challenges of handling spent fuel in a more secure way. As countries already operating civil nuclear programmes know, establishing a civil nuclear programme carries both significant cost and technological challenges.

So I would encourage countries embarking on civil nuclear programmes for the first time to consider all options. This should include detailed examination of whether a collaborative approach, perhaps at a regional level, could provide a new opportunity to make access to civil nuclear power a reality. With the oversight of an international body, countries could join together to share in the development of a civil programme, and this approach could be particularly beneficial in regions such as the Middle East where already the Gulf Cooperation Council has proposed a joint nuclear technology programme for peaceful applications conforming to international regulations.

I very much hope that this conference will generate further contributions which will inform our proposals as part of the Road to 2010 Plan we would like to publish this summer.

Just as we must reshape the international financial architecture, to meet the challenges of a global economy, so too we must reshape the international architecture that deals with proliferation in a global society. I accept that this will require new funds from within the international community for a significantly changed global work programme. The changes will be significant: a central role in the security of fissile material; a clear and proactive mandate to inspect with enhanced powers of inspection to cover not just civil programmes but also eventually military programmes; more support and training for an inspectorate that will cover both the extension of civil nuclear power and the monitoring of any abuses of the Non-Proliferation Treaty; and binding guarantees about the safeguards in place.

But if the International Atomic Energy Agency is to play this enlarged and reformed role, its safeguards regime would also need to be further strengthened. This means everyone should implement the highest level of safeguards possible, such as the additional protocol giving the IAEA the power to ensure that there is no indication of activity designed to turn peaceful nuclear energy programmes into nuclear weapons.

Beyond this, we also need to look at the development of next generation safeguards which introduce even greater levels of assurance. Any material failure to cooperate with inspections, and any material breach or withdrawal from the Non-Proliferation Treaty, should automatically lead to reference to the United Nations Security Council, and indeed it should be assumed that sanctions will be imposed in response to anything other than the most minor of breaches.

At the moment the international community has to prove an offence against the treaty, but in future the right to develop nuclear energy should be matched by knowledge obligations towards openness and transparency. And having signed the treaty it should be the country's responsibility to prove it is adhering to the treaty and to dispel and disprove any accusations of its being undermined.

It is vital that we also ensure that terrorists cannot get their hands on nuclear material. This requires revised, stronger, universally implemented international standards for the protection of fissile material. We will bring forward proposals for such standards as part of the plan - the Road to 2010.

Every nuclear state and prospective civil nuclear state must give security the highest attention. It is an essential component of the investment in nuclear programmes. Since 2003 in the UK we have spent more than £70 million on improving security at our Sellafield site alone, and we are committed to spending a further £220 million on the construction of a state of the art storage facility.

But we understand that to be effective, security must meet the highest standards around the world. So in addition to the £270 million we have spent on global threat reduction projects since 2002, and a further £36 million that we will spend each year for the foreseeable future, we are doubling our contribution now to the IAEA's nuclear security fund and we will work with our partners to identify ways to strengthening the role of the nuclear suppliers group whose work is I believe of vital importance.

It is important to note that in an horrific event of an attack, after the fact detection is now an established science, it would allow us to attribute the origins of the material used in almost any nuclear device. We are therefore in a position to identify those responsible and thus define liability for providing assistance to terrorists. The supplier must accept responsibility, just as the perpetrator, and thanks to the advance of science there can be no escape from justice.

Now to achieve our objectives we need two major breakthroughs: effective and universal mechanisms to prevent proliferation from non-nuclear weapon states; and active steps by nuclear weapon states towards disarmament. And now is the time for serious commitment to both.

So the other core ambition of the Road to 2010 proposals we will publish this summer is a credible road map towards disarmament by all the nuclear weapon states, through measures that will command the confidence of all the non-nuclear weapon states.

Now of course we have seen already huge cuts in weaponry, an estimated total of 40,000 warheads have been destroyed since the end of the Cold War. But what we need is more than this, we need a forward plan for multilateral disarmament, a joint commitment that is shared and accepted by nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states alike. We must begin by reducing the number of nuclear weapons still out there in the world, and between them the US and Russia retains around 95%. The START Treaty, the mainstay of their bilateral arms control effort, will expire later this year and I welcome their commitment to find and work for a legally binding successor which I hope will pave the way for greater reductions to come.

For our part, as soon as it becomes useful for our arsenal to be included in a broader negotiation, Britain stands ready to participate and to act. The nuclear choices being made today will determine whether we face a future arms race or a future of arms control. Averting the former and promoting transparency in the latter are both vital to our common future.

So the recognised nuclear weapon states must now show unity and leadership and set tirelessly to work on a programme of confidence building measures.

I will gladly share for the benefit of all the pioneering work that we have done in the United Kingdom on the science of verifying warhead destruction. Our atomic weapons establishment, working with partners from Norway, have been developing techniques that

can provide reassurance that nuclear weapons have been destroyed, without giving away sensitive information about warhead design.

Now Britain has cut the number of its nuclear warheads by 50% since 1997 and we are committed to retaining the minimum force necessary to maintain effective deterrence. For future submarines our latest assessment is that we can meet this requirement with 12 - not 16 - missile tubes as are on current submarines. In Britain our operationally available warheads now number fewer than 160 and the government keeps this number under constant review. If it is possible to reduce the number of UK warheads further, consistent with our national deterrence and with the progress of multilateral discussions, Britain will be ready to do so.

In the meantime we must drive forward the multilateral agenda, the first steps of which are to commence urgent negotiations without preconditions on a fissile material cut-off treaty, and for all states to sign and ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. States have national interests but capping the production of weapons usable fissile material and outlawing the testing of nuclear weapons are two powerful and achievable goals that I believe are consistent with the long term needs and interests of every state.

So as we stand together against those who would seek to threaten our security, and in some cases even our existence, I offer today a practical plan to deliver on pledges that have been made. Today I believe is a time for leadership and confidence and common purpose, not for weakness, withdrawal or retreat.

So let us go forward, fully recognising the importance of the tasks before us, for the sake of future generations across the world let us ensure that the chapter of history we write together, our generation, here and today, tells the story of a common journey towards a world that is free from the fear of its own destruction. And let this be a journey of hope in which hard-headed cooperation by friends who were once foes define our modern age, and let it be underpinned by this new covenant of hope that brings us a truly global society, not of enemies fearful of each other, but of partners with a confidence to work together for peace.

Thank you very much.