



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

The Rt Hon. James Cleverly MP
Minister of State for the Middle
East and North Africa

King Charles Street
London
SW1A 2AH
Tel: 0207 008 5000

Baroness Anelay of St Johns
Chair, International Relations and Defence
Committee
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0AA

Email:
fcdo.correspondence@fcdo.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/fcdo

February 2021

Thank you for your letter of 25 January 2021 about the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). As ever, we value the Committee's continued engagement on this issue.

The UK agrees with the Committee's assessment that the TPNW risks exacerbating existing polarisation while delivering no immediate disarmament benefits. We are committed to the long-term goal of a world without nuclear weapons, in line with our obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). We firmly believe the best way to achieve this is through gradual multilateral disarmament negotiated through the NPT. Our goal remains to work with the international community, including both TPNW advocates and opponents, to ensure a successful NPT Review Conference that upholds the NPT as the cornerstone of the non-proliferation regime.

We do not seek to take an aggressive tone with TPNW supporters. However, it is important that the UK makes clear its objection to the assertion that the entry into force of the TPNW now makes nuclear weapons illegal under international law. The TPNW is only legally binding to those states that join it. The UK and all other nuclear-possessor states did not take part in the negotiations, and do not intend to join the Treaty. We do not accept that the TPNW contributes to the development of customary international law.

While the UK Government remains opposed to the TPNW, we recognise the importance of continuing dialogue with supporters of the Treaty. We have had, and will continue to have, constructive conversations with advocates and States Parties aligned to the Treaty. Senior officials have had bilateral meetings with a number of TPNW States Parties on the issue, with further engagement planned in the run up to the NPT Review Conference. These contacts are valuable opportunities for the UK to understand the concerns of TPNW advocates, to explain the UK position and to look for areas of commonality.

We regularly engage with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), civil society and academia, to discuss disarmament issues and to explore areas of potential progress that support the confidence-building required to improve the international security environment. We welcome dialogue with experts and actively invite ambitious ideas about how to optimise conversations between civil society and government leads. For example, senior UK officials from the FCDO and MOD met a broad range of civil society groups at a roundtable events convened by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

As we get closer to the NPT Review Conference, FCDO, MOD and BEIS officials would be happy to brief the Committee on the UK approach. Please let me know if this would be of interest.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J. Cleverly', is positioned above the printed name.

The Rt Hon. James Cleverly MP
Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa