PERMANENT MISSION OF THE UNITED KINGDOM
TO THE CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY
58TH SESSION
First Committee

STATEMENT

by Ambassador David Broacher
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to the
Conference on Disarmament

United Nations Register of Conventional Arms

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The UK warmly welcomes the consensus Report of the 2003 Group of Governmental Experts on the continuing operation and further development of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms. This was the fourth review of the Register and the first time since the establishment of this instrument in 1992 that agreement was reached on significant technical adjustments to the Register's categories. The UK believes the report contains a number of significant recommendations, which are designed to further improve the operation of the Register and enhance its global relevance. Of most significance were those recommendations for technical adjustments to two of the seven categories of conventional arms covered by the Register.

First, it is recommended that the reporting threshold for Category III “Large-Calibre Artillery Systems” should be lowered from 100 to 75 millimetres. This will make a significant contribution to addressing the security concerns associated with Light Weapons and increase the Register's relevance in those regions most afflicted by these weapons. The UK also hopes that this will serve to increase participation in the Register, thereby strengthening its role as an important confidence building measure.

Second, the Group recommended that Man-Portable Air-Defence Systems, or MANPADS, should be included in Category VII “Missiles and Missile Launchers”. The significant threat posed by terrorist use of MANPADS has been acknowledged globally and all measures to prevent their diversion into the hands of terrorists must be strengthened. Transparency in the legal transfer
of these weapons contributes to our ability to be assured of their destination. It is also a recognition of the particular military threat that they can pose.

Mr Chairman

The Group’s recommendations also contained provisions for further strengthening the role of the Secretariat in promoting the continued progress of the Register. The UK believes it is particularly important that the Secretariat be given the necessary resources to support the Register, explaining its role, promoting participation through regional workshops, and making the contents widely and easily available to Member States.

In addition, the Group identified a number of issues on which consensus could not be reached this time, but to which further consideration should be given by the next review process. One area of particular importance to the UK, and others, is the potential for the Register to support the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. There is significant potential for the Register to support global action in this area. The UN Programme of Action (PoA) highlighted the importance of transparency as an essential component of dealing with the problems of SALW proliferation. It reads:

“To encourage regions to develop, where appropriate and on a voluntary basis, measures to enhance transparency with a view to combating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects.”
In this regard, the UK encourages Member States, that are in a position to do so, to submit data on their Small Arms and Light Weapons transfers as part of the voluntary additional background information to the Register. The UK will be undertaking to do so and hopes that this practice will be recognised by the time of the next regular review.

The UK believes that, apart from technical adjustments to the seven categories of the Register, the scope of the Register should be expanded to include reporting on procurement through national production and military holdings. Merely having data on transfers is not enough. An adequate assessment of whether transfers and build-ups of conventional weapons are indeed destabilising is difficult. Accurate assessments rely on a baseline (military holdings) and access to military technology from national production to build the complete picture. The increasing willingness of participating nations to provide such background information (including details of types) goes a long way towards satisfying this requirement and is to be further encouraged. Placing such information on the same footing as that for transfers would be a major contribution to the operation and usefulness of the Register.

Mr Chairman

The UK commends the Group of Experts for their recommendations and looks forward to the further strengthening of, and greater participation in the Register.