Statement by Ambassador Chris Sanders of the Kingdom of The Netherlands on 'Transparency in Armaments' (L.45)

Mr. Chairman,
It is my honour to present to this committee, also on behalf of more than one hundred co-sponsors, the annual resolution on Transparency in Armaments with reference L.45.

Mr. Chairman,
It is a good thing that this year we look critically at the relevance of the work we are doing here. The items under discussion in the First Committee should reflect the most serious and typical disarmament concerns we have. The question then is: do they?
This is of course not the moment to reopen that debate. But let me just say, that apart from a number of items whose relevance have diminished, there are also issues already on our table with quite an acute present-day significance.
Take yesterday’s New York Times, which carried a front-page article on steps to be taken against the danger of shoulder-fired missiles.
What we call MANPADS, or Man-portable air-defence systems, are worldwide among the most serious threats to security. These deadly weapons, capable of bringing down large passenger aircraft, sell for as little as $5,000 and are known to be in the hands of terrorists. There are tens of thousands of them on the international market. And, once in the wrong hands, they are a threat to all of our societies.

This year, we broadened the scope of the U.N. Register on Conventional Arms. We agreed on including smaller artillery systems and MANPADS. It was the first time since the establishment of the instrument, that agreement was reached on significant technical adjustments to its categories.
How important is that? Its importance might be twofold. First, because of the content. Including these weapons in the Register’s scope, means a broadening of transparency.
Second, it was an important step because it shows that we can still take significant steps in the field of arms control. It is encouraging to see that real progress in the field of disarmament can still be made.

Mr. Chairman,
I singled out the MANPADS, but they are just one example of the relevance of the concept of Transparency in Armaments in general. It is one of the major confidence-building principles among states, enabling the international community to be better informed about military matters and developments. Transparency in Armaments thus diminishes misperceptions and helps to avoid information getting distorted.
The instrument has developed steadily over the years. Increased participation by states demonstrates the growing confidence that transparency can help prevent excessive accumulation of arms, also by encouraging self-restraint in military production and transfer of arms.

The growing confidence in the U.N. Register is evident from the upward trend in reporting. So far this year, 118 member states have submitted their reports ever the year 2002.
Four new member states have joined this global reporting instrument for the first time. Allow
me to congratulate the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Laos and Timor-Leste for joining the Register. A record 154 member states have now participated one or more times in the Register since 1992. Of course, it remains crucial that all of us continue our participation in the coming years.

States which have reported in previous years but not yet this year, can still send their submission to the Secretariat. I would also urge those countries that have submitted a report only once or a few times, to participate on a consistent basis. Consistency would significantly raise the level of participation and thereby the level and significance of this confidence-building measure. Participation includes so-called "nil-reports" that confirm that no transfers took place in the calendar year.

Let me furthermore express appreciation to the governments of Canada, Germany and Japan, for joining The Netherlands in co-sponsoring a number of workshops devoted to the U.N. transparency instruments in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean in the past year.

This is also an appropriate moment to again express our sincere appreciation to the U.N. DDA Secretariat, in particular Mr. Nazir Rana, for their efforts in compiling and publishing the Register and assisting Member States with the submission of their reporting.

Mr. President,
The Register has established a 'de facto' norm of transparency in armaments, which governments must take into account. It provides a significant amount of information officially reported by governments, which otherwise would not have been available. It is important for regional and inter-regional consultations between governments. But the Register also performs an important role in public information, promoting accountability of political and military leaderships. Moreover, the Register also has stimulated many governments to improve their national systems for monitoring and controlling arms transfers.

Mr. President,
Notwithstanding all the good news this year on the U.N. Register, we are still far from true universal participation in the instrument.

In this context, it is important to note that the concept of Transparency in Armaments is certainly not restricted to conventional armaments only. The desirability of transparency applies as much to weapons of mass destruction as it does to conventional weapons. So it is a good thing that multilateral treaties on weapons of mass destruction provide for their own mechanisms to ensure transparency.

We are encouraged by the constructive dialogue that we have developed with those countries that are not yet in a position to participate in the Register and who have not yet given their support to this resolution. We will continue to work with them. I therefore sincerely hope that this committee will continue to give its widespread support to the resolution on Transparency in Armaments in general, and to the U.N. Conventional Arms Register in particular.

Especially since it is, in my opinion a fine example of the relevance the First Committee can have for today's global security challenges.

Thank you, Mr. President.