STATEMENT
BY
SOUTH AFRICA

ON THE REPORT OF THE 2003 GROUP OF
GOVERNMENTAL EXPERTS ON THE
UNITED NATIONS REGISTER OF
CONVENTIONAL ARMS AT THE
FIRST COMMITTEE

UNITED NATIONS
NEW YORK
22 OCTOBER 2003

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Chairperson,

My delegation welcomes the Report of the Secretary-General on the continuing operation of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and its further development.

Mr Chairperson,

The UN Register continues to be the most significant global transparency instrument in the field of conventional arms transfers and as such, we would strongly encourage broader participation in the Register by all UN Members. The Report not only contains very useful information and statistics on conventional arms transfers, but importantly, information on the deliberations, conclusions and recommendations of the 2002 Group of Governmental Experts. South Africa is pleased to note that the 2003 Group made significant strides in the review and further development of the Register. This is the first periodic review of the Register that has yielded substantive results and this exercise has underlined the importance of such regular re-examinations, as it is vital that the Register develops into an instrument that is more widely perceived as being relevant, particularly amongst developing countries.

In this context Chairperson, the Group’s recommendation that the artillery threshold be lowered from 100mm to 75mm, is particularly welcomed as it will include reporting on transfers of more of the types of equipment that have been used in recent conflicts in Africa, such as in the DRC, Ethiopia and Eritrea. The inclusion of Man-Portable Air-Defence Systems (MANPADS) in the missiles and missile launchers category represents a significant step in bringing the Register’s categories in line with arms increasingly being used in the twenty-first century and in contributing to the global fight against terror.

South Africa has noted that during the deliberations a number of other proposals were raised, but that the Group was not able to reach consensus on these issues. Importantly, my delegation is aware that the Group spent a significant amount of time discussing the issue of small arms and light weapons as the weapons of choice in conflicts in Africa and the rest of the developing world and in this context, reflected on how the transfers of these weapons could be included in the Register. We acknowledge that reporting on these weapons transfers may be difficult, but South Africa continues to believe that this is one area where the Register may gain some relevance for African countries.

Chairperson,

South Africa’s view is that if this instrument is to gain broader support, this cannot be achieved by Member States alone. In this context, my delegation is also aware of the fact that the Group spent some time discussing the support that the UN Secretariat could provide in the achievement of this goal. We note that the Group
recognized the need to support the strengthening of the Department for Disarmament Affairs (DCA) in order to improve the continuing operation of the Register and that it concluded that the Department should actively support and promote the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms as a primary mission. The DCA needs the necessary financial support to be able to do so.

In conclusion, Chairperson, my delegation would like to thank the Chairperson of the 2003 Group of Governmental Experts, Ambassador Roberto García Morlán of Argentina, for the exemplary manner in which he guided the deliberations of the Group. The success of the Group can in no small part be attributed to his engaging and facilitating style, consultative approach, patience when that of some members of the Group had run out and his enormous wealth of experience in multilateral diplomacy. We commend him for his tireless efforts.

I thank you,