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Disarmament

(Thematic debate)

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Switzerland attaches the highest importance to multilateral cooperation in the area of small arms and light weapons, anti-personnel mines, explosive remnants of war and conventional weapons in general. These weapons - together with explosive remnants which remain in the ground after the end of hostilities - are real weapons of mass destruction. Every year they cause several hundred thousand deaths and injuries, particularly among civilian populations. The general debate of last week showed how much importance delegations attach to the problem of conventional weapons and to the humanitarian concerns relating to the use of these arms. Switzerland supports all our Commission's resolutions on this issue and hopes that other delegations will also do so.

Our joint efforts to solve the problems caused by conventional weapons and our humanitarian concerns about the use of such weapons are part of a wider concern for human security and for the economic and social development of each country. Action by the international community on conventional weapons should therefore not only be closely coordinated with economic and social development programmes but should if possible be integrated into such programmes from the outset and should adopt a long-term perspective. The simple fact is that there can be no economic and social development if illicit conventional weapons continue to cause innumerable deaths and injuries and to devastate entire regions.

In the field of victim assistance, Switzerland in conjunction with the ICRC, the WHO, UNICEF and Handicap International, has developed a strategic concept including not only mine victims, but all victims of violence. Only the integration of victims into the wider context of post-conflict reconstruction and into strategies of longer-term development co-operation will provide effective and sustainable solutions. Initial valuable experience has been gained in various countries, including Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Nicaragua and Mozambique. This global approach is widely recognised and used also by UNMAS and UNDP. The next step is to implement the strategy at national and regional level.
Today the international community has at its disposal a number of important multilateral instruments in the area of conventional weapons: the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and its four protocols, the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty and the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons. My country calls on all states who have not already done so to ratify these instruments as soon as possible and to adhere to and to implement all the measures specified in the Programme of Action.

On the subject of the Mine Ban Treaty, my country is very pleased with the success of the Fifth Conference of States Parties, which ended some weeks ago in Bangkok. This conference enabled participants to measure the substantial progress that has been made since the convention came into force, especially with regard to the destruction of stockpiles. It again underlined the importance of dealing with the question of non-state actors within the framework of the Ottawa Convention. Finally, the Bangkok meeting paved the way for the first Review Conference which will be held in Nairobi next year, and which will set in motion preparations for achieving a second important objective of the convention — the clearing of anti-personnel mine fields.

On the subject of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, my country supports the work on explosive remnants of war. It hopes that it will soon be possible to adopt a new instrument on this subject, which will be substantial and legally binding. Switzerland also hopes that all the States Parties will be willing to accept a system of preventative technical measures. Such measures are designed to prevent sub-munitions from becoming explosive remnants of war. This would undoubtedly have a positive and important impact on the humanitarian situation in regions affected by the use of such munitions, but without simultaneously weakening military capacity. Finally, in view of the many fatal accidents caused by mines other than anti-personnel mines, Switzerland considers it necessary that more specific regulations should be drawn up for this area within the framework of the 1980 Convention.
On the subject of small arms and light weapons, the category of conventional weapons which causes the largest number of victims, my country attaches great importance to the rapid implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action which was adopted in 2001. In this context, we are delighted with the success of the First Biennial Meeting held in New York in July. The conference highlighted a number of important initiatives for implementing the Programme of Action, especially in the areas of export control, marking and tracing, security of stocks and strengthening of regional cooperation. The large number of national reports proves that states are willing to become increasingly active in the fight against illicit small arms and light weapons on a national and on a global level. Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go. It is essential that this commitment does not falter and that states are determined to achieve the goals they have set themselves.

Our efforts to improve the marking and the traceability of illicit small arms and light weapons are also part of the Programme of Action. Switzerland, together with France, has been active for a long time in efforts to draft an international instrument on marking and tracing. Switzerland congratulates the Group of Experts on its final report. This group recommends the opening of negotiations with a view to drafting an international instrument on the marking and tracing of illicit small arms and light weapons. This recommendation is included in the resolution on small arms and light weapons proposed by South Africa, Japan and Colombia. My delegation wishes this resolution to be passed without a vote. Moreover, if a negotiation process could be launched, Switzerland would be willing to chair the working group that would be established to this end. Switzerland remains committed to the elaboration of an instrument that will be an appropriate response to the challenges posed by the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.