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Statement on behalf of the European Union

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Conventional Weapons

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1. I am speaking on behalf of the European Union. The Accession Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Croatia* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this declaration.

2. The uncontrolled proliferation and wide misuse of small arms and light weapons (SALW) is at the heart of the main security challenges of our time. Action against it has to be intensified. SALW and their ammunition are instrumental in the deaths of more than 500,000 people annually, the vast majority of victims being civilians. SALW constitute a major factor in triggering and spreading conflicts and collapse of State structures, facilitate violent crime and terrorism, impede post-conflict reconstruction and undermine development. Of the 49 major conflicts in the last decade, 47 were conducted with SALW as the major weapons. Since then, the intensified international action against terrorism has made the fight against the illicit trade in SALW even more urgent.

3. The EU is committed to work against the uncontrolled proliferation and misuse of SALW. The EU aims at reducing the unregulated availability of SALW in areas of conflict or potential conflict by promoting strict transfer controls and safe destruction of surplus weapons, promoting measures for limiting the demand and helping affected governments deal with all aspects of the problem. More broadly, the EU also aims at tackling the fundamental causes of instability, among other things by pursuing and stepping up its efforts with regard to political conflicts, development aid, poverty reduction, and promotion of human rights and the rule of law. To further its objectives, the EU has a specific strategy to combat illicit accumulation and trafficking of SALW and their ammunition, and various specific instruments at its disposal. These include a Code of Conduct on Arms Exports, a Joint Action on combatting the destabilising accumulation and spread of SALW, and a Common Position requiring from Member States that each introduce national legislation to effectively control the activities of brokering.

4. The EU is one of the foremost international actors in efforts to combat the illicit trade in SALW, including the practical work on the ground. In addition to action being financed by Member States in their national programmes, the EU and the European Community allocated for the years 2003-2005 some 105 million euros for external assistance programmes of relevance to small arms action. We are committed to a continued leading role in this area, and call on others to join the efforts to the maximum possible extent.

5. The World Summit 2005 Outcome Document stressed the negative effects of the illicit trade in SALW. The world leaders expressed grave concern at the effects on development, peace and security, and human rights, posed inter alia by the illicit trade of SALW. They committed themselves to
supporting the implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicat the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (hereinafter Programme of Action). The EU calls for ensuring in concrete terms, that there is immediate practical value for the SALW action in the Outcome Document’s commitments, including among other things the work to be done and the resources to be provided, as appropriate, by the Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Fund. The EU will fully contribute to the expeditious and comprehensive implementation of SALW-related UNGA resolutions, including addressing the negative humanitarian and development impact of the illicit manufacture, transfer and circulation of SALW and their excessive accumulation, and invites others to do likewise.

6. The EU is deeply disappointed that the UN Programme of Action Review Conference was unable to agree an outcome document. Notwithstanding this, we recognise the value of this conference in reaffirming our commitment to the principles, measures and objectives of the Programme of Action. This commitment continues to be transformed into concrete action on national and regional levels and this should be the case also for global level. We will need to assess together our efforts, achievements and shortcomings. This review starts at the national level, but necessarily requires being global in order to seriously address the nature of the small arms problem. We look forward to coming together on a biennial basis, as established both in the Programme of Action and in the International Instrument on Marking and Tracing at the time and place to be decided by the current General Assembly. The review cycle should culminate in a Review Conference.

7. The EU continues to strongly encourage progress to improve SALW transfer controls. The EU will continue to work for wider understandings between States on the need for global guidelines for transfer controls on the basis of the common understandings that were developed at the Review Conference this year.

8. The fight against the illicit trade in ammunition continues to be another pressing task. From the beginning of the UN process on SALW, ammunition has formed an integral part of the problem. Currently there is a growing awareness of the importance of this problem, reflected also in the resolutions adopted by this Committee. It is time that we addressed the problem of conventional ammunition in a more active and comprehensive manner.

9. Global standards on marking and tracing of SALW are essential for tracking and cracking down on the illicit trade in these weapons. The adoption of the International Instrument on Marking and Tracing was a first and important step in the implementation of the UN Programme of Action in this regard. The EU supports full implementation, and further strengthening in the future, of the International Instrument on Marking and Tracing, e.g. by making it legally binding.
10. Brokering controls remain a high priority for the EU as illicit brokering is recognized as being among the main factors fuelling the illicit trade in SALW world-wide. The EU is looking forward to a substantial report by the GGE on brokering. In our view, the GGE should take a practical approach to its work and recommend concrete measures necessary to combat the harm done by unscrupulous illicit arms brokers.

11. The EU is convinced that assistance to countries affected by armed violence should be provided as an integral part of development strategies, given the close link between security and development. We have also noted the "Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development", adopted on 7 June this year, which clearly spelled out the linkages between armed violence and development. States should mainstream action to eliminate illicit SALW and integrate armed violence prevention programmes in plans and strategies related to security, development and poverty reduction. The EU believes that the Group of Interested States in New York with its regular meetings is making a valuable contribution to this end.

12. Let me now turn to an important new proposal calling for the establishment of an Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) which we have also mentioned in our general statement. Every day, and everywhere, people are affected by side effects of irresponsible arms transfers. The negative impact on peace, reconstruction, security, stability, human rights and sustainable development is especially damaging to developing countries, in particular in Africa. In addition, it diverts scarce resources from vital poverty alleviation and other developmental work. The EU has noted that there is a strong call from a number of the world's political, as well as spiritual leaders, States, and civil society for the establishment of a new treaty to better regulate the trade in arms.

13. As there is currently no comprehensive internationally binding instrument available to provide an agreed regulatory framework for this activity, the EU welcomes the growing support, in all parts of the world, for an ATT. The EU considers that starting of a comprehensive formal process to this end at the UN at the earliest opportunity is called for and views the draft resolution under discussion as providing the basis for this.

14. Binding standards, consistent with the existing responsibilities of states under relevant international law, would be critical in tackling conventional arms proliferation which is undesirable and irresponsible and which particularly affects some of the most vulnerable parts of the world.

15. The use of Man Portable Air Defence Systems (MANPADS) by terrorists and non-state actors as a tool for threatening civil aviation, and also aviation involved in peacekeeping operations, warrants worldwide attention and sustained and comprehensive action. MANPADS are extremely lethal, easily concealable and inexpensive. In this respect, the
EU firmly supports broader efforts, in various multilateral fora, focusing in particular on export controls including the Wassenaar Arrangement, the OSCE and the G8 initiative to internationalise controls.

16. EU Member States have been working with other States in the field of MANPADS destruction and stockpile and security management and will continue to work proactively to help those States, not in a position to do so, to secure their stockpiles and to destroy surpluses of these weapons. The EU encourages other States, where they are able to, to participate actively in stockpile and security management and destruction activities, to help guard against further illicit use.

17. The EU fully supports intensifying efforts to prevent the illicit transfer and unauthorized access to and use of MANPADS, including strenuous implementation of the UNGA resolutions adopted by consensus. Growing international concern about the proliferation of MANPADS needs to be translated into practical support to international, regional and national efforts to combat and prevent the illicit transfer of MANPADS and unauthorized access to and use of such weapons.

18. The EU welcomes progress achieved in universalising the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention destroying stockpiled anti-personnel mines, clearing mined areas and assisting the victims. We consider the First Review Conference which took place in Nairobi in 2004 as a landmark success that provided the international community with an opportunity both to assess and reflect on the progress that has been made on the path to a mine free world and to refocus our efforts to achieving this goal. In order to overcome the remaining challenges for the full implementation of the Convention, the Nairobi Conference agreed on an ambitious Action Plan for the next five years, to which the EU is fully committed. We welcome and support the subsequently adopted Final Documents of the Sixth and Seventh Meeting of States Parties, held in Zagreb 2005 and in Geneva 2006 respectively.

19. Building on this success, the EU welcomes the appeal of the World Summit to the Parties of the Convention to fully implement their commitments as well as to all states in a position to do so to provide greater technical assistance to mine affected States. We wish to call upon all states that have not yet done so to ratify or accede to the Convention as soon as possible. The EU is united in its support for and promotion of the resolution on the implementation of the Convention.

20. The EU has provided assistance to affected states and communities and will continue to do so. For the years 2003 to 2005, the EU Member States and the European Community allocated over 530 million Euros for mine action. Speaking on behalf of the EU, we would like to point to the European Community's strategy (in particular its strategy for the years 2005-2007) which, in the light of an interim target of zero new victims, seeks to reduce the threat of landmines on the ground and in stockpiles.
by offering social, economic and medical assistance to local populations affected and to the victims of landmines. The EU as a whole will continue to support humanitarian mine action focused on the poorest mine affected countries. We will continue to work to improve the effectiveness of the international mine action system.

21. The Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) and its Protocols constitute an essential and integral part of international humanitarian law (IHL). The CCW has a solid, well-balanced regime, which takes into account both humanitarian concerns and military requirements. It has proved its usefulness in creating a number of new legally binding instruments. The EU attaches great importance to the effective implementation of the CCW and its Protocols, as well as to continuing, with determination, the work on creating new legally binding instruments under the CCW where necessary, as for instance in the case of mines other than anti-personnel mines (MOTAPMs).

22. The CCW is particularly topical now due to the holding of the Third Review Conference in November. The tasks of the Review Conference are to review, clarify and strengthen where necessary the existing obligations and their implementation. The EU looks forward to a successful Review Conference that is a Conference contributing to upholding and developing this regime in a way that further strengthens IHL, and we support the efforts of the President-designate of the Conference.

23. The Review Conference should also achieve successful results on the issues currently under discussions in the CCW process, notably on MOTAPMs. The EU wants to achieve tangible results by the Review Conference through a legally binding instrument on MOTAPMs which strikes a balance between humanitarian concerns and military considerations and which strengthens international humanitarian law. We call on all States Parties to the CCW to make the expected progress possible at the Conference.

24. Another current issue that the EU wishes to highlight is that of explosive remnants of war (ERW). On this issue, the EU sees several goals that should be pursued simultaneously: universalisation of the Protocol V, its expeditious and effective implementation, and continuation of further work on munitions that may become ERW, including sub-munitions. The further work should contain both work on strengthening implementation of existing IHL and work on possible preventive technical measures.

The EU recalls its proposal, made at the last Preparatory Committee meeting of the Review Conference, that as a minimum the mandate of the Working Group on ERW be extended at the Review Conference.
In this context, we would state our view that the Review Conference should be also forward-looking, setting perspectives for useful future work until the next Meeting of States parties, which should be held next year, and the following Review Conference.

25. Transparency in the area of conventional arms, and in particular SALW, is an essential component in fighting the uncontrolled proliferation of these weapons and in providing an atmosphere of confidence and security. To this end, the EU welcomes the recommendations of the Group of Governmental Experts that has carried out the fifth review and further development of the UN Register of Conventional Arms. The achievements of the Group pave the way for development and progress with respect to the overall aim of the UN Register, that is effective transparency in armaments. The recommendations of the Group need to be implemented, and the work on further developing the UN Register continued.

* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.*