61st Session of the General Assembly
The General Debate of the
First Committee

Conventional arms – Thematic debate

Statement by:

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United Nations, New York
13 October 2006

Check against Delivery
Madam Chair,

Conventional arms control require particular attention by the international community in view of the growing amount of civilian casualties and human suffering caused by indiscriminate and irresponsible use of such weapons. States have the legitimate right to use them to ensure their security and defense. However, conventional arms used or even obtained by terrorists, or by organized crime can have a clear destabilizing strategic impact.

Arms as such do not pose threats. As aptly phrased many years ago "A sword never kills anybody; it is merely a tool in the killer's hand". At the national level, the need for arms is in most cases due to given situations in which States are compelled to defend themselves and secure their territory.

The sad reality in the Middle East combines extensive armaments, illicit transfer of arms to terrorists and hostile intentions. Terrorism cannot sustain itself without the assistance of states providing it with support and safe haven. When safe haven is not granted, terrorist organizations seize it. They hide themselves and take up positions among civilians, using innocent men women and children as human shields as they target civilians with missiles and rockets. As we have witnessed in the last conflict in our region, the use of such weapons by terrorists has a major destabilizing regional and global potential.

In this aspect we stress again the paramount importance of seeing to full and complete implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions and more specifically, of Resolution 1701, operative paragraph 15. It is clear to all now, at least to most, that the flow of arms to the Hizbullah must be immediately and completely stopped.

Madam Chair,

A way to ease tensions in such a regional context is through mutually agreed-upon confidence building measures aimed at reducing tensions and enhancing regional security and stability. Building trust and confidence in a region will consequently reduce the need for armaments. When nations live together in a spirit of peace and good neighborliness, it becomes possible to decrease armaments and increase transparency.
Transparency in armaments can also reduce tensions. We believe that, in principle, the success of transparency is closely tied to the normalization of political and military relations among neighbors. Israel is convinced that the UN Register is an important instrument and that its contribution to regional and global stability and security is undoubted. Since the inauguration of this instrument, Israel has responded annually to the register regarding its seven categories of the major battle weapons. We have done so despite the lack of trust that exists in our region with the hope of building confidence in our troubled area. We are encouraged by the successful conclusions of the group of experts on the register. We hope that this development will encourage others in the region and elsewhere to report to this important instrument.

Madam chair,

As we have stressed in our general statement, there is a vital need to identify priorities in order to effectively address the real threats to international peace and stability. In this respect, we believe that it is necessary for the international community to devote more attention to the threats of illicit proliferation of conventional weaponry. Arms need to be controlled at the national level and effective national restraint on transfers must be instituted. This should be achieved by keeping in mind the proper balance between legitimate security needs of states and the prevention of unnecessary human suffering and loss of life.

My government sees in the irresponsible use and transfer of conventional arms a serious threat to regional and global security and stability. The consequences of the spread of these weapons, or worse, their acquisition by terrorist or criminal elements, are invariably the loss of innocent life. It is our opinion that the best way to curb illicit arms proliferation is through strong national commitment and determination. In order to ensure that this goal is pursued and achieved, international legally binding instruments preventing the proliferation of weapons to terrorists should also be developed.

It is our view that States bear the primary responsibility of ensuring that no weapons are transferred from their territory without proper oversight. States must undertake marking and recording procedures for all weapons, rigorous export control, the securing of stockpiles and appropriate national legislation to prevent the misuse and proliferation of arms.

Illicit transfer of small arms and light weapons has affected many societies worldwide, causing suffering primarily to civilian populations. Those transfers exacerbate internal conflicts, thereby increasing human
suffering and threatening peace and security. Not only does it generate a humanitarian problem but it has also impacted considerably upon all levels of society, economically and socially.

The UN Program of Action of July 2001 has made a significant contribution to international arms control efforts in the past few years, and has raised the issue of illicit trade in SALW to a higher priority. More and more states are aware today of the urgent necessity to apply enhanced standards of control over small arms and light weapons. Surplus small arms and light weapons are being destroyed, and standards related to marking and record keeping, as well as the tracing of illicit SALW, are becoming globally accepted.

The UN POA was designed to achieve a significant task, namely to prevent and eradicate illicit trade in SALW in all its aspects. The international community has mandated the review conference of June to find the effective means to reduce the humanitarian devastations caused by illicit trade in SALW. Although the review conference failed to agree on a concluding document, this conference reiterated the key role of the UN POA. We, like others, regret that the conference was not capable of reaching a consensus document.

The outcome of the review conference should encourage the international community to adopt a focused approach that would identify those concrete measures that can address the illicit aspects of the SALW transfer, rather than trying to regulate legal and legitimate arms trade. Moreover the fact that some states chose to divert the focus of the review conference to venues remote from the issue of illicit trade in SALW could pose serious questions as to the effectiveness of the follow up process.

Israel is ready to continue to explore with other interested states ways to identify those standards for transfer control that will effectively reduce illicit trade of SALW. Such standards could include the implementation of the marking and tracing instrument, full compliance with UN Security Council arms embargos, the assessment of the risk of diversion to illicit end-users, a ban on the transfer of MANPADS to non-state actors, a ban on transfers to terrorists, satisfactory management and control of stockpiles.
Madam Chair,

One of the significant achievements of the Registers' GGE work in 2003 is the inclusion of Man Portable Air Defense Systems, MANPADS as a sub-category under category 7 dealing with Missiles. The inclusion of MANPADS in the register was made as an exception as this type of weapon system is attractive to terrorist groups while on the other hand is a legitimate means of defense for states.

The problem of illicit proliferation and use of MANPADS encompasses a variety of issues, such as the control and monitoring of these types of weapon, preventing transfers to non-state actors - in particular terrorists, airport security, aircraft protection, scientific cooperation, collection and destruction of old and surplus missiles, safeguarding storage facilities, technological improvements to prevent unauthorized use, and similar issues.

The threat those weapons pose to civil aviation is unquestioned. The international community should therefore apply special treatment to the issue of MANPADS. As mentioned before, the UN register has already acknowledged MANPADS as a unique type of weapon system by adding it as a subcategory to the reporting requirements. Moreover, the UN General Assembly's first committee resolution on MANPADS, 60/77, introduced by Australia, underlined the need to apply measures to ensure that these weapons are not directly or indirectly transferred to terrorists or other non-state actors. Moreover, the Wassenaar arrangement gave due consideration to this threat by adopting in 2003 the "Elements for Export Controls of Man-Portable Air Defense Systems" which serve as a solid basis for conducting practical measures to ensure the prevention of their diversion into the wrong hands.

For its part, the government of Israel has incorporated the Wassenaar guidelines on the transfer of MANPADS into its export control regulations. To our knowledge Israel is the first, if not the only, non-member state to the Wassenaar Arrangement that has done so, demonstrating that universal application of the "Elements" is possible and feasible, thus reducing the threat of MANPADS in the hands of terrorists.

In addition, as a contribution to the ongoing efforts to address this threat, our government hosted a meeting in Jerusalem last April of more than thirty experts from different regions in the world. This experts' meeting underlined the complexity of the problem on one hand, while on the other, the need to enhance international efforts to address this problem. We intend to continue to work together with other interested states in
order to find methods to enhance the implementation of existing international instruments and standards relating to MANPADS and act to promote the development of other needed instruments on this issue.

On the question of brokering Madam Chair, Israel welcomes the establishment of the Group of Governmental Experts and looks forward to its successful outcome. An Israeli expert will participate in the work of the group and we have full confidence that the group will be able to identify measures to address the problem of unauthorized brokers.

Madam Chair,

Israel sees in the CCW convention and its protocol an important tool to reduce human suffering. The realistic spirit and character of this convention strike the right balance between the development of new legally binding norms on the use of weapons in order to reduce unnecessary human suffering on the one hand, and the legitimate military needs of states on the other.

As a State Party to the convention, Israel has participated actively in the negotiations of Protocol 5 on Explosive Remnants of War and welcomes its entry into force during the upcoming Review Conference next month.

We attribute great importance to this upcoming meeting. We are of the view that this meeting could adopt a sixth protocol on Mines Other than Anti-Personal Mines based on the deliberations and negotiations that took place in Geneva during the past four years. On the issue of compliance, we hope that the meeting will be able to reach a consensual outcome.

Thank you Madam Chair