Thematic Debate: Conventional Weapons

Thursday 12 October

Madame Chair,

In today's plenary, I would like to take the opportunity to address aspects of the conventional weapons debate relating to both the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, and to small arms and light weapons. I shall first address CCW issues before moving on to small arms.

In the upcoming CCW Review Conference in November, New Zealand will be looking for progress on the effective implementation of international humanitarian law so as to mitigate the humanitarian impact of conflict.

In particular, New Zealand is committed to the negotiation of a legally binding instrument on cluster munitions: one which allows our concerns relating to reliability, targeting, transfers and destruction of outmoded stocks to be addressed. We were one of a group of countries which introduced a negotiating mandate for consideration at the Review Conference, to address the humanitarian concerns posed by cluster munitions.

Key elements which we should be addressing in our pursuit of more specific international regulations include:

- Firstly: the problematic persistent nature of failed cluster munitions;
- Secondly: any use of cluster munitions within areas with concentrated civilian populations;
- Thirdly: indiscriminate attacks of a nature to strike combatants and civilians alike;
- Fourthly: the use of these weapons in circumstances likely to cause disproportionate loss of civilian life and damage to civilian objects;
- and lastly: the worrying potential for increased proliferation, retention or use of outmoded cluster munitions stocks.

The negative impact of cluster munition contamination on humanitarian operations and economic recovery in post-conflict situations is already well-established, with corroborating evidence from recent events reinforcing the necessity for action.

We would also welcome the conclusion of an instrument on mines other than anti-personnel mines, if a legally binding text could be agreed that made a credible improvement on existing international humanitarian law provisions. We
do not see that this requirement could be satisfied by the conclusion of a text which carried optional provisions on the key issues of detectability and active life.

On small arms, we were among those who were disappointed not to have reached agreement on an outcome document recording this year's review of the 2001 Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects.

We do not underestimate the complexities of reconciling state sovereignty, commercial and trade freedoms as well as civil liberty considerations, with steps that need to be taken at the global level to mitigate and prevent the harm done by illicit trade in light weapons. However, we consider that further global level action is possible, and is warranted.

In this context, we strongly support the initiative by the United Kingdom and others to launch discussions at the UN level on an arms trade treaty, and we welcome the circulation of a draft resolution on this subject for consideration at this meeting.

We very much welcome Canada's initiative to co-convene a global meeting on principles to guide decisions on transfers of small arms and light weapons, which will be held in Geneva in mid 2007. The "suggested global guidelines" which emerged from Nairobi meeting on Transfer Controls last April appear to us to be a sound platform on which to build such discussions.

We look forward to the report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Brokering. We consider that this too should help maintain momentum on small arms and light weapons over 2007.

Thank you.