Statement by Robert L. Luaces, United States Alternate Representative to the First Committee, on DPRK, Conventional Arms Registry and missile launches, October 16, 2006

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Our Delegation takes the floor this morning to address two conventional arms control issues: the UN Register of Conventional Arms, and the issue of missiles in all its aspects. First, however, our Delegation wishes to commend the Security Council for its adoption on Saturday, by a unanimous vote, of Resolution 1718, which imposes sanctions against North Korea in response to its claimed nuclear test on October 9. This Resolution is legally binding on all UN Member States, in accordance with Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations.

By enacting Resolution 1718, the Security Council has sent an unambiguous message to North Korea that it must eliminate its nuclear weapons and nuclear programs, and halt its development and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and missiles. Resolution 1718 requires all Member States to prevent materials, resources, and technology that could be used for weapons of mass destruction, ballistic missiles, and certain armaments listed in the UN Register of Conventional Arms from going to or from North Korea. The Resolution also freezes financial assets that support such activities, precludes travel by persons supporting such activities, and imposes other, related sanctions. Finally, Resolution 1718 calls on the Member States to take cooperative action to implement and enforce its terms, including, as necessary, through the inspection of cargo traveling to or from North Korea.

Madam Chairman, it is crucial that all states work together to take concrete action to implement Resolution 1718 expeditiously. Only thus can governments make clear to the leadership of North Korea that its provocative and destabilizing actions are unacceptable, and that they will be countered.

Madam Chairman, our Delegation now would like to turn its attention to General Assembly Resolution 46/36 L, which established a multi-step process to put into operation a voluntary register of conventional arms transfers. The UN Register of Conventional Arms was intended to help prevent the excessive and destabilizing accumulation of arms in order to promote stability and strengthen international peace and security, taking into account the legitimate security needs of states and the principle of
undiminished security at the lowest possible level of armaments. Member States were called upon to provide annually to the Secretary-General relevant data on imports and exports of conventional arms to be included in the Register. Member States also were invited to report on their military holdings and procurement through national production and relevant policies.

By any measure, Madam Chairman, the Register has been a resounding success, establishing a global norm of transparency and accountability in military matters and reinforcing civilian control of the military. During its fifteen years of operation, annual participation in the Register has ranged from 85 to 126 states. More than 170 states have participated in the Register at least once, 142 states have participated three or more times, 101 states have participated at least seven times, and 50 states have participated every year.

By reporting on both imports and exports, the seven categories under the Register have captured the vast majority of the international conventional arms trade. Even though some states may not participate in a given year, or may have never participated, the Register captures transfers involving many of those states. For the latest completed calendar year, 2004, the activities of 22 countries that did not participate that year, several of which have never participated in the Register, were captured in reports submitted by other countries. The United States continues to make it a strong objective to universalize annual participation in the Register.

Madam Chairman, Groups of Governmental Experts convened by the Secretary-General have conducted periodic reviews of the Register's operation and made recommendations on its further development in 1994, 1997, 2000, 2003, and 2006. The first three concluded that the seven existing categories within the Register adequately covered the weapons of most concern to the international community. However, feedback received from a series of regional and subregional workshops held between 2001 and 2005 propelled the last two GGEs to make substantive changes to the Register. Those workshops revealed overwhelming support for increasing the utility of the Register by having it report transfers of small arms and light weapons, as well. The 2003 GGE responded by adding man-portable air defense systems, lowering the artillery threshold from 100 mm to 75 mm, and opening the door to voluntary reporting of transfers of SA/LW.
Under the direction of the distinguished Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Argentina, this year's GGE opened the door further by agreeing to an optional standardized form for reporting SA/LW transfers, and by recommending that states in a position to do so report such transfers to the Register. The GGE also agreed to lower the reporting threshold for warships and submarines from 750 metric tons to 500 metric tons. These substantive additions demonstrate the continuing vitality and relevance of the Register.

Secretary-General Annan summed up the role of the Register in his foreword to the report by this year's GGE to the General Assembly, as follows:

Quote: "The United Nations Register of Conventional Arms plays a valuable role in the world's efforts to discourage the excessive and destabilizing accumulations of conventional arms.... At a time when the international community faces challenges in pursuing disarmament and upholding the non-proliferation regime, the positive outcome of the Group's deliberations is especially welcome." End quote.

Our Delegation takes this opportunity to reaffirm United States support for the Register, and encourages all governments, as applicable, to consider or to continue submitting annual reports to the UN Register of Conventional Arms as a global confidence-building measure in the field of conventional armaments.

With regard to the issue of missiles in all its aspects, Madam Chairman, the United States notes that the Third Panel of Governmental Experts on Missiles in all its aspects is to begin work in 2007. The two earlier Panels devoted extensive and valuable work to produce a report on this topic, and our Delegation would not like to see their efforts wasted. Specifically, the second Panel produced a final draft that represents near consensus. We believe that the work of the third Panel should be based on this nearly completed final report, rather than begin the process all over again, thereby repeating work that already has been conducted. Our Delegation considers that, despite its obvious value as a resource for next year's Panel, the new UNIDIR report on missiles is neither suited nor appropriate, for a variety of reasons, to serve as the basis on which the Third Panel of Governmental Experts on Missiles in all its aspects should complete this work during 2007.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.