UNITED KINGDOM DELEGATION TO
FIRST COMMITTEE

STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE CO-AUTHORS
OF RESOLUTION L55

"TOWARDS AN ARMS TRADE TREATY:
ESTABLISHING COMMON INTERNATIONAL
STANDARDS FOR THE IMPORT, EXPORT AND
TRANSFER OF CONVENTIONAL ARMS"

AMBASSADOR JOHN DUNCAN

18 OCTOBER 2006
Madam Chair,

I have the honour to introduce the resolution on behalf of the 7 original Co-Authors: Argentina, Australia, Costa Rica, Finland, Japan, Kenya and the United Kingdom.

Let me say at the outset how much we appreciate and value the support of the 89 members of the UN who have so far agreed to co-sponsor this Resolution.

Madam Chair,

The idea of an Arms Trade Treaty is not new but it may help friends and colleagues if I were to say a few words on what lies behind the decision of the seven Co-Authors to bring this proposal to the UN. I will explain why the United Kingdom believes that the time has come for us all to engage in an informed discussion on whether and how to develop common international standards on the import, export and transfer of conventional arms. We believe that that discussion can assist our collective efforts to promote peace, and security, and thus contribute to our endeavours to “Promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom”

Madam Chair,

The moral case for an Arms Trade Treaty is well known and has been made more eloquently than I could do here, most notably by Nobel Peace Prize laureates, Civil Society and more recently by spiritual leaders drawn from all the worlds major faiths.

Madam Chair, we share the concern about the human cost, and on the wider detrimental effect of irresponsible arms transfers for example on sustainable development.

Madam Chair,

All of us in this room recognise that the threat to international peace and security posed by conventional weapons is not by their intrinsic nature. We also recognise the inherent and fundamental rights of States to provide for their defence and security. The first obligation of the Nation State is to protect its citizens: this is clearly set out in the UN Charter.

The United Kingdom is one of the world’s major arms producers. The arms industry forms an important part of our economy and many thousands of ordinary people depend upon these companies for their employment. You would understand that we have come to our position of supporting the need for an ATT only after considerable thought and consultation.

The issues are indeed complex. While there is already a fair degree of commonality on the criteria and norms which arms manufacturing and exporting countries apply in their national controls, it will be a challenge to develop common international standards. But
it is the firm view of the Co-Authors that we should begin that discussion, and strive towards achieving that aim.

Moreover, Madam Chair, we believe that it must be a discussion which involves both consumers and producers and that the UN is the most suitable forum for this discussion. The alternative of simply increasing and widening co-operation amongst suppliers would not be appropriate. The Co-Authors are pleased to note that many of the emerging arms suppliers share our view on the need for a more comprehensive and inclusive approach and have indicated their support by volunteering to co-sponsor this resolution.

Madam Chair,

The resolution, which the Co-Authors tabled last week follows extensive consultation with a wide number of UN member states over many months. Our watchword throughout has been transparency and inclusiveness.

The Co-Authors via the United Kingdom's overseas missions sought views from almost all UN Capitals on two separate occasions. In Geneva an Informal Group drawn from a representative cross section of regions helped the Co-Authors develop their ideas before the first draft text was tabled on 24 July.

During the past two weeks we have held two open-ended meetings during which the Co-Authors listened carefully to the concerns of others. Following each meeting, we have attempted, without compromising our essential principles, to respond to those concerns in good faith and have adjusted the language of the text. It is not our intention to use this resolution as attempt to trap nations into agreement on an ATT. I would like to make clear again that our aim is to launch a discussion. The Co-Authors believe that the position of those who remain agnostic about an ATT is protected by the text.

Madam Chair,

In conclusion, let me on behalf of the Co-Authors, again express our thanks to the many states from across the world who have joined us in cc-sponsoring this resolution, including traditional producers, emerging suppliers and consumers, thus reinforcing the view that the time has come to begin a serious, open and transparent discussion on the feasibility, scope and parameters of an ATT. Our sincere hope is that all colleagues will support this initiative.

Thank you Madam Chair