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Thematic Discussion on Conventional Weapons

Statement by

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on behalf of the European Union

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Please check against delivery
1. I am speaking on behalf of the European Union.

The Candidate Countries Croatia¹ and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia ¹, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, and the EFTA country Iceland, member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Armenia align themselves with this declaration.

2. The illicit manufacture, transfer and circulation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and their excessive accumulation and uncontrolled spread are at the centre of the security challenges of our time. SALW and their ammunition are instrumental in the death of more than 500,000 people annually, the vast majority of victims being civilians. SALW constitute a major factor in triggering and spreading conflicts, as well as in the collapse of State structures. The spread of SALW contributes to terrorism and organised crime, delays post-conflict reconstruction and undermines development.

3. The EU is strongly committed to eradicating the illicit accumulation and trade in SALW and their ammunition. The EU aims to reduce the unregulated availability of SALW and their ammunition in areas of conflict or potential conflict. More broadly, the EU also aims to tackle the fundamental causes of instability, 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 adopted a specific strategy to combat illicit accumulation and trafficking of SALW and their ammunition. Other specific instruments include a Code of Conduct on Arms Exports, a Joint Action on combating the destabilising accumulation and spread of SALW, and a Common Position requiring Member States to introduce national legislation to effectively control the activities of brokering.

4. The EU Strategy on SALW and their ammunition is global in scope, encompassing technical and financial assistance to a wide range of related programmes. 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 relevant small arms and light weapons external assistance programmes. We call on others to join this effort.

5. 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, States are encouraged to integrate action to eliminate illicit SALW and prevent armed violence into plans and strategies related to security, development and the reduction of poverty. In this context we welcome the "Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development" which highlighted the relationship between armed violence and development, and we call on Member States to subscribe to the declaration.

6. We believe that more resources should be channelled to supporting the implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (hereinafter referred to as UNPoA) and particularly in developing countries. The EU continues to support the work of the Group of Interested States (GIS) as a forum for initiating concrete project work with regard to implementing the UNPoA.

7. The EU was deeply disappointed that the UNPoA Review Conference was unable to agree on an outcome document last year. Notwithstanding this, we recognise the value of this conference in reaffirming our commitment to the principles, measures and objectives of the UNPoA. There is a continuous need to jointly

¹ Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.
assess our efforts, achievements and shortcomings at national, regional and global levels. We look forward to coming together on a biennial basis, as established both in the UNPOA and in the International Instrument on Marking and Tracing. In this respect, we attach the utmost importance to the preparations for the next Biennial Meeting of States in 2008. In our opinion, the review cycles should continue to include Review Conferences.

8. The EU continues to strongly encourage progress to strengthen SALW transfer controls. The EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports has made an important contribution to this goal by setting up conditions for the responsible transfers of arms by EU Member States and Associated States. The European Union also continues to attach great importance to the efforts of the Wassenaar Arrangement on Export Controls for Conventional Arms and Dual-Use Goods and Technologies in further strengthening arms transfer controls. The EU is determined to contribute to reduce the risk of diversion of SALW into the illicit market, in particular through efforts to combat illicit trafficking of SALW by air, inter alia by increasing cooperation and exchange of information between States.

9. The fight against the illicit trade in ammunition continues to be another pressing task. Uncontrolled stocks of ammunition contribute to the risks of trafficking and proliferation and to the prolongation and intensification of armed conflicts. Furthermore, insufficiently secured stockpiles in storage depots constitute a threat to security, health and the environment. Currently there is a growing awareness of the importance of the ammunition problem. This is reflected in the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly. In this regard, the EU looks forward to supporting the work of the group of governmental experts (GGE) on “Conventional Ammunition Stockpiles in Surplus” to be established in 2008 pursuant to resolution 61/72.

10. Global standards on marking and tracing of SALW are essential in tracking the illicit trade in these weapons. The adoption of the International Instrument on Marking and Tracing was a first 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 to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons (The International Tracing Instrument) inter alia by making it legally binding.

11. Brokering controls remain a high priority for the EU as illicit brokering is recognised as being among the main factors fuelling the illicit trade in SALW world-wide. We welcome the report of the GGE established by the Secretary-General pursuant to resolution 60/81. We all need to implement the recommendations contained in the report as well as continue consideration of further steps to prevent, combat and eradicate illicit brokering in SALW.

The recent informal meeting organized by the Government of Canada in Geneva contributed to a better understanding of issues related to transfer control principles for SALW.

12. On this occasion I would like to reiterate the EU’s position on the pressing need for an Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). Every day, and everywhere, people are affected by 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 development work.

13. The EU firmly supports the elaboration of a comprehensive, legally binding instrument establishing common international standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional arms. The European Union is convinced that the United Nations is the only appropriate forum to deliver a truly universal instrument.

14. The EU has noted that there is a strong call from States and civil society for the establishment of a treaty to better regulate the trade in arms. The growing support in all regions of the world is well documented by the
overwhelming majority in the General Assembly for the adoption of Resolution 61/89 and by the record number of States that responded positively to the Secretary-General’s request for views on feasibility, scope and draft parameters of an Arms Trade Treaty.

15. We reiterate our view that the establishment of binding standards, consistent with the existing responsibilities of states under relevant international law, would be a major contribution to tackling the undesirable and irresponsible proliferation of conventional weapons which undermines peace, security, development and full respect for human rights.

16. The European Union is committed to playing an active role in this process. We urge other States to actively support the ATT process and the work of the GGE to be established next year.

17. The use of Man Portable Air Defence Systems (MANPADS) by terrorists and non-state actors as a tool for threatening civil aviation demands further attention and sustained and comprehensive action. MANPADS are highly 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 Principles for Export Controls of MANPADS and the G8 initiative. The EU supports initiatives both in the wider context of the UNPoA as well as targeting MANPADS related issues specifically.

18. 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 themselves, to secure their stockpiles and to destroy surpluses of these weapons. The EU encourages other States to help in this task.

19. The EU fully supports intensifying efforts to prevent the illicit transfer and unauthorised access to and use of MANPADS, including through implementation of General Assembly resolutions adopted by consensus.

20. This year marks the 10th Anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Antipersonnel Mines and their Destruction. The EU welcomes progress achieved in universalising the Convention, destroying stockpiled anti-personnel mines, clearing mined areas and assisting victims. Good progress has been achieved in these areas, although much remains to be accomplished.

21. The EU remains fully committed to the Nairobi Action Plan adopted at the First Review Conference in 2004. The Nairobi Conference agreed on this ambitious plan, valid until 2009, for the full implementation of the Convention. This will allow us to make progress towards a mine free world without any new anti-personnel mine victims. In order to assess and reflect on the progress made and to overcome the remaining challenges we welcome the Meetings of States Parties, held in Zagreb in 2005 and in Geneva in 2006, and look forward to the next meeting in Jordan later this year.

22. Promoting and achieving universal adherence to the Convention remains a priority. Ten years ago, more than fifty countries produced and sold anti-personnel mines. Since then, a major effort was made to ban production and trade of these items. Almost 80% of the world’s states have now acceded to the Convention. However this is not yet enough, as important countries remain outside the Convention. We call upon all states that have not yet done so to ratify or accede to the Convention as soon as possible.

23. The European Union and its Member States continue to provide major financial and technical support to mine action around the world. Over the last ten years, this financial support has amounted to a total of around 1.5 billion Euros. We urge other States in a position to do so to provide greater assistance to mine-affected States. The EU believes that a particular emphasis should be put on mine clearance as well as on victim
assistance. The rehabilitation and reintegration of survivors is a crucial task that must be seen in broader contexts linked to development and human rights.

24. The Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) constitutes an integral part of international humanitarian law (IHL) and the EU attaches great importance to it. That is why the EU is pleased to support the Plan of Action to promote Universality of the CCW adopted at the 3rd Review Conference last November. The EU was an active participant at this successful Review Conference and calls on all CCW States Parties to join in supporting the universalisation of the Convention and its five annexed Protocols.

25. During the last review cycle of the CCW, we were able to make some significant progress. We refer, in particular, to the entry into force of Protocol V on Explosive Remnants of War and the decision to hold the First Conference of the High Contracting Parties to Protocol V next month. The European Union also welcomed the adoption of a Sponsorship Programme and the decision on a compliance mechanism. The EU has adopted a Joint Action to promote the universalisation of the Convention and its Protocols and to support their implementation. The Joint Action includes a substantial contribution to the Sponsorship Programme.

26. Regarding the issue of Mines Other Than Anti-Personnel Mines (MOTAPM), the EU has provided substantial input before and during the 3rd Review Conference of the CCW Convention and will remain committed to bring this important humanitarian issue forward.

27. The European Union wishes to highlight the issue of cluster munitions. Recent events have again reminded us of the negative impact on the civilian population and the huge clearance burden these weapons can create. The EU Member States and many others from around the world have considered the issue of cluster munitions as a matter of humanitarian concern. The agreement to a discussion mandate on cluster munitions and the establishment of the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) was a first step towards negotiating a new instrument aimed at addressing the humanitarian impact of cluster munitions. The EU would be pleased to see the CCW regime develop in a way that would further strengthen international humanitarian law, taking into account both military requirements and humanitarian concerns.

28. The EU is deeply concerned about the humanitarian impact caused by cluster munitions. We consider that this issue is a vital element in the work of the CCW. In this context the EU submitted a draft mandate for the negotiation of a legally binding instrument to be finalized by the end of 2008 that addresses the humanitarian concerns of cluster munitions in all their aspects. We have submitted this proposal with the aim of concluding a legally binding instrument that prohibits the use, production, transfer and stockpiling of cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians and includes provisions on cooperation and assistance.

We did so with the aim of enabling the CCW to clearly show its relevance to matters of international Humanitarian Law in general and humanitarian concerns of cluster munitions in particular.

29. The June meeting of the GGE ended with a Chair's recommendation that at the annual CCW Meeting of High Contracting Parties in November 2007 the States Parties decide how best to address the humanitarian impact of cluster munitions, as a matter of urgency, including the possibility of a new instrument.

We call upon all High Contracting Parties to the CCW to support the EU proposal for a negotiating mandate (CCW/GGE/2007/WP.3). The EU will make every effort for its proposal to meet their support.

30. 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. The recommendations of the Group of Governmental Experts on the "continuing operation of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and its further development", during its fifth review were incorporated in UN
Resolution 61/77 on Transparency in Armaments. They pave the way for development and progress with respect to the overall aim of the UN Register, which is effective transparency in armaments. UN Member States that have not yet contributed to the UN Register are called upon to do so. In particular, the European Union stresses the importance of including information on SALW in Member States’ annual report to the Register, using the newly adopted standardised form for SALW notifications

31. Objective information on military matters, including transparency on military expenditures constitutes a key element of confidence between States and can thus contribute to conflict prevention. The EU welcomes the fact that the participation in the reporting system of military expenditures according to Resolution 60/44 has increased almost steadily since its establishment in 1981. This indicates the growing understanding on the important role of transparency on military expenditures. In its reply to the UN SG, the European Union suggested a GGE to prepare a report on the operation and further development of the Standardized Instrument for Reporting Military Expenditures, taking into account the views expressed by UN Member States on the subject. UN Member States having not yet participated are encouraged to submit their reports.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.