STATEMENT

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DURING THE FIRST COMMITTEE
THEMATIC DEBATE ON
CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS/ SMALL ARMS

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STATEMENT BY SOUTH AFRICA DURING THE THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS OF THE FIRST COMMITTEE DURING THE 62ND SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS/ SMALL ARMS

Thank you, Chairperson,

As Members will know, just last month the 155 States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty marked the tenth anniversary of its adoption in Oslo, Norway. South Africa is particularly proud of this milestone, as many of you will recall that the final negotiations on the Convention were chaired by South Africa’s former Ambassador Jackie Selebi.

While vast tracts of land have been cleared of APMs over these last ten years and returned for productive use and while eighty States Parties have met their Treaty obligations to destroy their APM stockpiles, leading to the destruction of an estimated more than 40 million mines, the greatest humanitarian concern remains that of assisting the rising number of mine survivors. Caring for mine survivors is a life-long obligation on all affected States, not only in terms of health care, but also in finding meaningful and very often alternative forms of employment for victims of mines. It is no coincidence that those States with the most significant victim problem also rank amongst the world’s poorest, where infrastructure hampers immediate post-trauma assistance and communication amongst key health, disability, rehabilitation and financial sectors are poor. The poorest amongst these nations often lack specific, measurable and achievable time-bound objectives, and some of these States Parties have yet to ascertain what is known or not known about the status of victim assistance in their countries.

Civil society has contributed in no small measure to the implementation of the Mine Ban Treaty. Indeed, as many know, the success story behind the negotiations on the Treaty was the close co-operation amongst Governments and civil society. In this spirit of co-operation, my delegation today appeals to those States and relevant organisations in a position to do so, to work more closely with these highly affected States to assist them in the development and also in the concrete implementation of their national survivor assistance plans.

South Africa views the 2007 Meeting of States Parties later this year as an opportunity to further highlight the importance of the Mine-Ban Treaty and to accelerate its implementation and universalisation to achieve the vision of a world free from anti-personnel mines.

Mr Chairperson,
The conflict in Lebanon last year not only caused numerous civilian casualties, but in its aftermath the numerous unexploded cluster munitions resulted in a humanitarian crisis of huge and tragic proportions. It has demanded that the international community address this issue urgently in order to prevent the threat of a similar catastrophe occurring in the future. In this context, South Africa fully shares the view of most States that an international instrument to prohibit the use, production, transfer and stockpiling of those cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilian populations is needed. As already stated in a different context, my delegation has followed international developments in this field closely and will remain flexible as to whether negotiations on such an instrument should take place within the framework of the CCW, or as part of a separate process.

Chairperson,

Turning now to small arms and light weapons, South Africa remains of the view that our efforts to fully implement the 2001 UN Programme of Action (UNPoA) on small arms and light weapons are paying off. This is particularly so in focusing attention on the illicit trade in these weapons and their ammunition at the global and regional levels. However, my delegation believes that much remains to be done at the respective national levels, especially in developing countries. It is, for instance, one thing to try and develop regional or even global principles or criteria on arms transfers, but these are quite meaningless when a State that participates in such initiatives such as workshops does not follow-up by incorporating those recommended principles in their national legislation, policies and arms transfer control structures and systems.

South Africa continues to believe that one of the most important undertakings that we made in the UNPoA are the elements contained in its section III, namely, "Implementation, international cooperation and assistance". Without serious efforts to assist those amongst us that are still experiencing capacity, financial and other concrete needs in key areas such as effective stockpile management and national arms control systems, theft, corruption and diversion will continue to fuel the illicit trade in these weapons and their ammunition.

My delegation is also of the view that much of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons would not take place were it not for the role played by corrupt arms brokers. We therefore believe that the recently concluded report of the Group of Governmental Experts on illicit brokering gives us some practical and constructive ideas on what States could do to prevent illicit brokering activities. It is our hope that the General Assembly will endorse the recommendations of the Group during this session.

I thank you, Chairperson.