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Thematic Discussion on

Conventional Weapons

Statement by

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LESOTHO

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Mr. Chairman,

Since this is the first time that my delegation takes the floor at this session, allow me to congratulate you and other members of the Bureau on your election to steer the work of the First Committee. My delegation is confident that with your rich experience and diplomatic skill, you will guide us to a successful conclusion of our work. Let me assure you of the full cooperation and support from my delegation.

I also wish to seize this opportunity to congratulate Ambassador Sergio Duarte for his appointment as the High Representative of the Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs and to express my delegation’s support for the work of the new Office of Disarmament Affairs.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation is deeply concerned by the widespread proliferation and indiscriminate use of conventional weapons, particularly small weapons and light weapons. In some countries, particularly in Africa, that are emerging from or are still engulfed by internal armed conflicts, the weapons have been transferred to non-state actors and have thus fueled the conflicts and caused havoc. For the people of the countries concerned, these indeed are the weapons of mass destruction. The humanitarian suffering caused by the conflicts and the cost on Africa’s development, of these conflicts which are exacerbated by use of illicit small arms and light weapons, are well-documented. My delegation therefore appeals to members of the international community to address the issue of the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons with the urgency and seriousness that it deserves.

Mr. Chairman,

It is rather unfortunate that due to their easy availability, the illicit small arms and light weapons, particularly firearms, from the conflict-ridden countries usually find their way into the neighbouring countries, where they are used for criminal purposes. My country Lesotho is no exception in that regard.

In Lesotho the illegal firearms are used, in the urban areas to commit serious crimes such as robbery and murder. In the rural areas, they are mainly used by organized criminal groups to perpetrate illegal acts including cattle rustling, across the common borders of Lesotho and South Africa. The groups from Lesotho obtain arms through bartering cannabis/dagga. These activities take place in very remote as well as
mountainous areas, with rugged or no roads at all. As it may be expected, there have been several reports of deaths of the involved nationals of Lesotho on both sides of the common borders between Lesotho and South Africa. The Government of Lesotho therefore continues to appeal for assistance to enable it to combat these menaces. The necessity of extending international assistance including technical assistance to the countries that need it is well stipulated in the 2001 UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. Hence, Lesotho remains concerned about the slow progress in implementing several provisions of the Programme of Action, including the one on international assistance.

**Mr. Chairman,**

The Government of Lesotho recognizes the need for the assumption of national responsibility to tackle the problem. The Government has therefore adopted some legal as well as administrative measures in that regard. Indeed the a new legislation was drafted in 2006, to replace the outdated Internal Security (Arms and Ammunition) Act of 1966. The Stock Theft (Amendment) Act of 2003, was also enacted and it clearly reflects the seriousness that the Government attaches to the link between stock theft and the us or threat of use of firearms. Furthermore, the Government has continued to encourage civilians who are in possession of unlicensed firearms and ammunition to hand them over without fear of prosecution.

Lesotho also attaches great importance to the cooperation that she shares with her sole neighbour, South Africa. Hence, Lesotho continues to engage in bilateral operations with South Africa to combat the flow of among other things, illicit firearms, ammunition and drugs, between the borders. Indeed, illegal firearms have been confiscated through such operations and we received technical assistance in 2001, that enabled the destruction of some 4,240 confiscated and redundant state-owned small arms.

**Mr. Chairman,**

Lesotho is also committed to regional and global efforts aimed at combating the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Lesotho is party to the 2001 in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on the Control of Firearms, Ammunition and Other Related Materials, the UN Convention against
Transnational Organized Crime, and its Supplementing Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition. Lesotho also fully subscribes to the 2000 OAU Bamako Declaration on an African common Position on the Illicit Proliferation, Circulation and Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons. Lesotho is committed to the full implementation of these instruments.

Mr Chairman,

Lesotho is encouraged by progress achieved so far in the implementation of resolution 61/89, entitled, "Towards an Arms Treaty". In our view, it is the urgent responsibility of the United Nations to facilitate the adoption of an effective international instrument for curbing the illicit trade in conventional weapons which will make it harder for such weapons to end up in the hands of criminals.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, Lesotho wishes to reiterate its commitment to the implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction. We call upon States that are not yet parties, to join the Convention.

I thank you.