Statement by Ms. Elsa Haile
Director of International Organizations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
During The
Thematic Debate On Conventional Weapons
At the First Committee of the Sixty-Second Session of the General
Assembly
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Mr. Chairman,

Conventional weapons used recklessly and irresponsibly, inflict no less harm and misery than weapons of mass destruction.

The proliferation of conventional weapons is a matter of increasing concern, because it has been the major instrument of destruction during the past few decades. The improvement in production technology, the sophistication and the availability of limitless quantity of weapons is severely destabilizing, putting at risk peace, security and development, serving as a catalyst to armed conflict, supporting criminal activities and causing human suffering. The combinations of irresponsibility, callousness and greed have not only caused massive destruction to life and property but also drained meager financial resources, which could have been used to combat poverty and famine, and have destroyed already fragile economies of, and destabilized, numerous countries.
The failure of the Review Conference of the UN Program of Action to agree on further measures to fully implement was of concern to Eritrea. Nevertheless, the forthcoming biennial meeting on implementation of the Program of Action will provide an opportunity to renew the commitment and seek ways to further measures to strengthen its implementation and follow-up mechanism. The meaningful implementation of the program could be achieved only if collective and individual action is taken at the international, regional and sub-regional levels. The Eritrean Government fully recognizes the necessity of regional, sub-regional and bilateral cooperation to terminate the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. To this end, it has consistently supported all initiatives and programs in the Horn of Africa, including efforts within the Regional Center for Small Arms (RECSA). RECSA where Eritrea is playing an active role, developed in the framework of the Nairobi Declaration on the Problem of the proliferation of illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa.

Eritrea has also held continued consultations with like-minded states in the region and elsewhere. In this respect, my country welcomes the report of the Working Group of Government Experts on Illicit Brokering of Small Arms and Light weapons.

Mr. Chairman,

This year marks the 10th Anniversary of the Adoption of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and their Destruction. Eritrea as a party to the Convention is fully committed to the total elimination of anti-personnel mines and unexploded ordnance. Eritrea is convinced that action must be taken to ensure the return of normalcy in the lives of our people and the people of the region.

Landmines are not only security problem, but also humanitarian one. Eritreans recognize, through their bitter experience of a thirty year war for independence and the recent border conflict with Ethiopia that landmines are the sources of suffering and pain to many innocent civilians, especially the vulnerable members of society; divert scarce resources from development activities; and constitute major threats to political stability. These silent killers have destroyed the lives of many innocent people. As a legacy of the wars, landmines and unexploded ordnance litter the countryside in many
areas, continuing to cause injuries and deaths. Due to this fact, my Government considers the mine clearance action as one of the highest priorities among activities for the rehabilitation and development of our nation. Eritrea embarked on a mine-clearing mission immediately after its liberation in 1991. In 1996, the Government established a National De-mining Center operated under the Ministry of Defense and consisting of a Command Unit, a Research Department, a De-mining Training Center and one Company of de-mining personnel. The Center received bilateral expert assistance in planning, organizing, training and resourcing its humanitarian de-mining operations, particularly, in developing a meaningful infrastructure capable of succeeding on its own. True to its tradition of self-reliance, Eritrea had also adopted a policy of “ownership” that would empower its agents to play primary role in the planning and implementation of programs and allow foreign donors to assist in the creation of structures, which underline the importance of capacity building.

After the signing of the Algiers Peace Agreements with Ethiopia, the Eritrean Government established the Eritrean De-mining Commission for the purpose of coordination of de-mining operations with UNMEE, which was succeeded by the Eritrean Mine Action Program (EMAP). EMAP was, later succeeded by the Eritrean De-mining Authority (EDA). The objectives of the EDA are to eliminate the threat of mines and unexploded ordnance, facilitate the return of IDPS to their villages, and ensure safe use of land and to conduct other development activities. To this end, EDA activities have included, development of a National Mine Action Strategic Plan on the basis of a land mine impact survey, establishing the legal and institutional framework for the participation of national and international NGOs and to oversee the strict observation and implementation of the Ottawa Convention.

I wish to conclude by reiterating Eritrea’s full commitment to the creation of a regional and international environment free of anti-personnel landmine. Eritrea is fully convinced that the struggle for the total elimination of landmines and unexploded ordnance must be waged at the regional and international level to achieve any tangible results.

Thank you.