Statement

by

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At the 1st Committee of the 62nd Session
At the United Nations General Assembly

on

The German/Romanian Draft Resolution
"Objective Information on military matters, including transparency of military expenditures"

23 October 2007

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Mr Chairperson, distinguished colleagues,
I have the pleasure to introduce the biennial resolution A/C.1/62/L.33 entitled "Objective information on military matters, including transparency of military expenditures".

I would like to take this opportunity to thank those nations who for the first time have co-sponsored our consensus resolution this year and brought up the number of co-sponsors to more than 55 nations so far. Let me encourage those delegations who are still considering to cosponsor to do so.

Mr. Chairman,
the draft German / Romanian biennial resolution which you have in front of you is on one hand a follow-up to the version of 2005 with some minor technical amendments and on the other hand you will find in OP 5 C a new element concerning the proposal of establishing a Group of Governmental Experts in the year 2010.

Let me continue with some general remarks on the operational side of this resolution. Since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 60/44 in 2005, the level of submission to the standardized reporting instrument by States has remained relatively stable, following the same pattern as seen in recent years.

In 2006, 82 submissions were received, the highest number since 2002, and in 2007 the same level of submission may be achieved, as some late submissions are expected.

Sustained effort is being made by the UN-Office for Disarmament Affairs to increase familiarity with the procedures of these instruments, with a view to encouraging greater and more consistent participation by promoting the UN reporting instrument world-wide and the transparency of military expenditures at the regional level. Notably, it presented background papers to the Organization of American States at a plenary session of its Hemispheric Security Committee in November 2006 and to the Seventh Defence Ministers Conference of the Americas held in Nicaragua in October 2006.

Last year, the Office for Disarmament Affairs posted an electronic booklet on its website entitled “Guidelines for reporting military expenditures to the UN standardized instrument” and this year another electronic booklet of historical interest has been posted, which deals with the transparency of military expenditures under the system established by the League of Nations - the predecessor to the United Nations.

Allow me to use this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to these important and sustained efforts of the Office for Disarmament Affairs.

Three Member States participated in the reporting system for the first time during the last two years: St. Vincent & the Grenadines and Tajikistan (in 2006) and People’s Republic of China (in 2007). As a result, a total of 124 States have so far participated in the UN reporting instrument at least once. This standardized reporting format covers expenditure on personnel, operations and maintenance, procurement and construction, research and development.

Mr Chairperson,
allow me to appeal to all countries that have so far not yet participated to join the Instrument by submitting information next year.
Let me now continue in explaining the reasons for the proposal to establish a GGE to review the operation and further development of the Standardized Instrument for Reporting Military Expenditures.

Notwithstanding the dramatic changes in the international framework conditions, the reporting system has remained almost unaltered since its introduction in 1981. So far there has only been one preliminary review of the reporting system, undertaken by a GGE in 1982, although this group did recommend that a further review should be undertaken in a few years time, once Member States had more experience with the new reporting system.

In our view time has now come:
The present reporting system may have a number of weaknesses, which make it considerably more difficult to compare and assess the reported data in a user-friendly way. Important supplementary data, e.g. defence expenditure as a proportion of the total budget and GDP, rates of inflation and budget estimates for the following years, are not collected. A certain level of assessment of the data provided could also be useful.

A review should also address the question of how participation in the reporting system could be broadened further.
Worldwide military expenditures have increased continuously since 1999. From 2001 to 2005 alone, the increase was an estimated 25.1%. The funds spent in this area are lacking in other areas of public expenditure. There is no reliable data on military expenditure for a number of countries. A fully updated UN reporting system on military expenditures could provide the internationally accepted information basis needed to contribute to transparency and confidence-building. The UN should therefore devote greater attention to the subject of military expenditures. The establishment of a GGE on this issue would send a clear message.

How could a mandate of such a GGE look like? What are possible goals?
Let me briefly highlight some:

Review of the procedures, operation and efficiency of the reporting system including an assessment of the questionnaire.

Proposals to facilitate greater and more constant participation including an investigation into barriers to state participation.

Recommendations for further improvements to the reporting system including proposals for an improved and even more user-friendly questionnaire, possibly with additional criteria in order to collect more reliable and more comparable data; considerations of ways to improve the form and operation of the reporting system, for example the establishment of an electronic database and the prompt entering of reports into this database; considerations on the possible introduction of some annual assessment of the reports as well as enhanced public information by the UN Secretariat about the data obtained through the reporting system; requirements for the UN Secretariat to operate and maintain the reporting system.

Mr. Chairperson,
let me conclude by again appealing to those states that have only participated once or just a few times, to participate on a consistent basis. Consistency alone will significantly raise the level of participation each year. Thereby it will contribute to the common goal of transparency in these important matters.

I express my hope that the resolution will again be accepted without a vote by consensus.