First Committee
25 October 2007

Thematic Debate: Conventional Weapons

Statement by H.E. Ms Caroline Millar
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Geneva

(Check against delivery)

Mr Chairman

Since this Committee last met, we have seen ongoing work in various multilateral arms control fora to combat the threat posed by conventional weapons.

Yet more work needs to be done at the national, regional and global level to stem the tide of suffering caused by these weapons, in particular small arms and light weapons (or SALW).

The proliferation of SALW is of great concern to Australia. Their illicit production and transfer in our region – and elsewhere – has proven an obstacle to security, stability and development.

The UN Programme of Action (or PoA) plays a vital role in stemming SALW proliferation.

After the disappointing 2006 Review Conference, Australia and others have been working hard to re-invigorate the PoA.

States will have a critical opportunity to further its implementation when the Biennial Meeting of States gathers in July next year.
We welcome the innovative resolution co-authored by Colombia, South Africa and Japan in focusing attention on that meeting. We hope the resolution will obtain the support it deserves.

Mr Chairman

Common international standards on trade and transfer would strengthen efforts against the illicit proliferation of SALW and other conventional arms. A well-crafted legally binding instrument would help to prevent illegal and irresponsible transfers while providing greater assurance for legitimate trade.

As a co-author of last year’s resolution on an Arms Trade Treaty, we are delighted by the overwhelming support for this resolution and the unprecedented number of submissions to the Secretary-General.

We look forward to participating in the important work of the Group of Governmental Experts, which provides an opportunity to explore further the scope, feasibility and draft parameters of such a treaty.

Mr Chairman

Australia is gravely concerned by the use of those cluster munitions which cause unacceptable harm to civilians. Australia will contribute strongly in both the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and the Oslo Process to address this humanitarian concern.

We strongly urge CCW States Parties to agree a mandate to negotiate next month.

Mr Chairman

Australia will table two resolutions this year.

We remain particularly concerned by the illicit transfer and unauthorised access to and use of man-portable air defence systems (or MANPADS).

It is essential that states implement effective controls over the production, storage and transfer of these weapons to prevent misuse by non-state actors.

The consequences of a MANPADS attack at a major aviation hub would be devastating – both in terms of lives and livelihoods lost.

Australia sees tighter controls on MANPADS enhancing the security of regional communities, helping to underpin their prosperity and growth.

Two years ago, Australia presented a resolution on this issue. The resolution was biennialised to support efforts to streamline the work of the Committee.
Consensus support for this resolution would again send a clear signal of the depth of international concern about the threat of non-state actors using such weapons. And of states’ determination to prevent this.

This year, we will table a slightly modified resolution and welcome co-sponsorship.

Mr Chairman

Australia will also table a resolution on the Mine Ban Convention.

We have streamlined handling of this resolution. It will be presented by Australia, Jordan and Croatia as the President, President-designate and previous President of the Convention’s Meeting of States Parties respectively. It is not open to co-sponsorship. This is a sign of the maturity of the Convention and brings it into line with the handling of other major arms control treaties.

We hope this important resolution will again attract an overwhelming positive vote. I urge those states abstaining in previous years to support the resolution as a sign of their commitment to stem the tide of suffering caused by this weapon.

Thank you.