62ND SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Statement by
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First Committee
Thematic debate on conventional weapons

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Check Against Delivery
Thank you, Mr. Chairman,

The uncontrolled spread of conventional weapons is one of the main sources of instability in regions around the world. Irresponsible transfers often contribute to increased human suffering, and become a barrier to development and a stumbling block to achieving peace and security.

In particular, the continuous and increased flow of sophisticated weapons and other military equipment and know-how to terrorists has lately exacerbated the nature of this threat. Among the sophisticated systems that have been found in the hand of terrorists are MANPADS, short range, medium range and long range rockets, missiles, UAVs and others. Such transfers can have a major destabilizing effect and stand in the way of diplomatic solutions to conflicts.

Arms transfers to terrorists also have shown the capacity to strengthen extreme elements in a conflict, thus turning terrorists groups into the dominating power. This dangerous phenomenon is also of global nature – not limited to any specific region – and constitutes an imminent threat to global security and stability. Moreover, the phenomenon poses a grave danger to the civilian population, as terrorists by their very nature intentionally use these arms against civilians.

Hence, the proper balance between legitimate security needs of states and the need to prevent unnecessary human suffering and threats against civilians must be attained by strictly controlling arms at the national level and by instituting effective national restraint on transfers.

Mr. Chairman,

My government believes that the best way to curb illicit arms proliferation is through strong national commitment and determination. In this context, I refer you to the working paper presented by my delegation to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva this past June. Here, I wish to briefly reference a few of those issues.

International documents and resolutions addressing the prevention of arms transfers to terrorists demonstrate a real need for a comprehensive and systematic approach. To this end, long enduring differences over definitions should be put aside for the sake of pragmatism, such as those shown by the international community vis-à-vis the creation of treaties addressing the different manifestations of terrorist activities.

One such step could be the identification of possible national programmes to increase awareness and build capacity. This could be followed by promoting avenues which enhance cooperation among states whether multilaterally or bilaterally.

Mr. Chairman,

Illicit transfer of small arms and light weapons has affected many societies worldwide, causing suffering primarily to civilian populations. The UN Programme of Action of July 2001 has made a significant contribution to international arms control efforts in the past few years, and has raised the issue of illicit trade in SALW to a higher priority. Today, more and more states are aware of the urgent necessity to
apply enhanced standards of control over small arms and light weapons. Surplus small arms and light weapons are being destroyed, and standards related to marking and record keeping, as well as the tracing of illicit SALW, are becoming globally accepted.

The UN POA was designed to prevent and eradicate illicit trade in SALW in all its aspects. The international community has mandated the June review conference to find the effective means to reduce the humanitarian devastations caused by illicit trade in SALW. Although the review conference failed to agree on a concluding document, this conference reiterated the key role of the UN POA. We, like other delegations, regret that the conference was not capable of reaching a consensus document.

Israel is ready to continue working together with other interested states to identify those standards for transfer control that will effectively reduce illicit trade of SALW, among these, implementation of the marking and tracing instrument, full compliance with UN Security Council arms embargos, the assessment of the risk of diversion to illicit end-users, a ban on the transfer of MANPADS to non-state actors, satisfactory management and control of stockpiles, and other similar measures.

We welcome the initiative by Canada to hold a special meeting in Geneva to discuss the issue of small arms and light weapons transfers. Israel also participates in the Geneva forum and is looking forward to a substantive biannual meeting of the POA. We believe the UNPOA should be the appropriate international framework to continue deliberations on this issue.

Mr. Chairman,

Although there are currently diverse instruments which – in a convoluted and disjointed manner – deal with the problem of arms transfers to terrorists, there remains a critical need for a focused strategy to deal with this threat in order to turn a principle into practice.

Israel, for its part, has maintained a vigorous national export control system throughout the years. Recently, moreover, Israel has embarked on a reform process designed to ensure that its export control system including the relevant legislation and operational framework meets recognized international standards, in particular those set by the International Suppliers Regime.

Last July, the Israeli Parliament approved the New Export Control Law, scheduled to enter into force on 31 December 2007, replacing the secondary law under which Israel’s export control system has operated thus far. The new law will regulate the control over items based on the Munitions list of the Wassenaar arrangement. It will also apply controls over dual-use items and technologies based on the dual-use list of the WA.

The new legislation establishes a new licensing authority within the Ministry of Defense. Moreover a new inter-agency process for evaluating licensing applications has been put in place, in which the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs plays an unprecedented major role.
Licensing applications are assessed within the inter-Ministerial process on a case-by-case basis according to recognized criteria, among which are UNSC embargos and sanctions regimes, international commitments of Israel, the internal situation including the respect for human rights in the state of destination, and the risk of diversion of those arms towards the illicit market.

Mr. Chairman,

Israel remains to be convinced that an international Arms Trade Treaty could indeed provide commonly agreed standards, which would enhance the level of care exercised by States in the sale or transfer of arms. This concern stems from the interest of ensuring that effective measures would indeed cease the uncontrolled flow of weapons and military equipment to untrustworthy hands, in particular terrorists. We also believe that in developing an ATT attention should be accorded to the possibility that such an instrument could be politically abused against states seeking to obtain arms for legitimate purposes of self-defense as well as the possible hindrance to legitimate trade in military equipment.

Finally, the CCW will face many challenges in the coming weeks. As a state party to the CCW, Israel is prepared to engage constructively in order to achieve a successful outcome of the November meeting. We see the CCW as the only credible and reliable forum to effectively address the humanitarian consequences caused by certain conventional weapons. This is done through carefully preserving a balance between humanitarian consequences and legitimate security considerations. Other initiatives not only threaten to undermine the CCW but may also divert resources from addressing the issue, which will hamper appropriate and a tangible response to the humanitarian needs.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.