Mr. Chairman,

Let me take a few moments to address the view of the United States on the UN Register of Conventional Arms. The United States has been a strong supporter of the UN Register and the Transparency in Armaments initiative since UNGA Resolution 46/36 L established a multi-step process to operationalize a voluntary register of conventional arms transfers. The Register was intended to help prevent the excessive and destabilizing accumulation of arms in order to promote stability and strengthen international peace and security, taking into account the legitimate security needs of states and the principle of undiminished security at the lowest possible level of armaments.

By any measure, the Register has been a resounding success, establishing a global norm of transparency and accountability in military matters and reinforcing civilian control of the military. During its sixteen years of operation, more than 170 states have participated in the Register at least once, 142 States have participated three or more times, 101 have participated at least seven times, and 50 have participated every year. Annual participation has ranged from 90 to 126 states. Still, by reporting on both imports and exports, the Register has captured the vast majority of the international conventional arms trade in the Register's seven categories. Even though some States may not participate in a given year or may have never participated, the Register captures transfers involving many of them.

Groups of Governmental Experts (GGEs) convened by the Secretary-General have conducted periodic reviews of the Register's operation and made recommendations on its further development in 1994, 1997, 2000, 2003, 2006, and 2009. The first two GGEs concluded that the Register's existing seven categories adequately covered the weapons of most concern to the international community. However, the 2000 GGE concluded that the Register did not address the security concerns of the states around the world whose security are threatened by the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SA/LW) rather
than by destabilizing accumulations of weapons in the Register’s traditional seven categories. A series of regional and subregional workshops held between 2001 and 2005 confirmed that the issue of participation was linked to relevance as many states were unwilling or unable to report to a Register that was not relevant to their security concerns. Those workshops revealed overwhelming support for increasing the Register's relevance by having it address transfers of small arms and light weapons.

This propelled the 2003 and 2006 GGEs to make substantive changes to the Register. The 2003 GGE added man-portable air defense systems and lowered the artillery threshold from 100 mm to 75 mm, and opened the door to voluntary reporting of transfers of small arms and light weapons (SA/LW). The 2006 Group of Governmental Experts opened the door further on SA/LW by agreeing to an optional standardized form for reporting SA/LW transfers and recommending that States in a position to do so report such transfers to the Register.

Unfortunately, the 2009 GGE to continue this effort to increase the relevancy of the Register. Although it did agree to a report, that report does not reflect either the broad discussions covered during the three sessions in Geneva and New York, nor does it reflect the closeness of agreement to add an eighth category to cover SA/LW. The 2009 GGE had started off well, with its first two sessions conducting a healthy and vibrant review of the Register’s operation. Consensus seemed to be forming around a proposal to add SA/LW to the Register as the traditional opponents in the GGE of adding SA/LW to the Register stepped aside. Unfortunately, on the last day of the third and final session of the 2009 GGE, a single Expert chose to block a proposal to culminate 9 years of discussion and 6 years of detailed proposals by adding SA/LW as an eighth category. The refusal of this expert to join consensus was a surprise and a significant disappointment. In our view this was a significant missed opportunity to improve the effectiveness of the UN Register. The 2009 GGE’s failure to address the security concerns of the states that traditionally do not report to the Register has
undermined the traditional GGE effort to promote universality of the Register.

For my country's part, we hope that States will excuse this failure and participate in the Register. In an effort to set the stage for the 2012 GGE on this subject, the 2009 GGE did agree to a recommendation to the UN Secretary-General to seek the views of Members States on the question of whether the failure of the Register to include SA/LW directly affected some national decisions not to participate in the Register. We urge all Members to provide their views on this subject. We hope and expect that the 2012 GGE will use this as the starting point for resuming the discussion on SA/LW that was broken off this year.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you.