UNGA 65: FIRST COMMITTEE

THEMATIC DEBATE: CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS

Statement by Dell Higgie
Ambassador for Disarmament

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Check against delivery
Mr Chairman,

This past twelve months has seen a number of significant developments in the conventional weapons arena.

First and foremost of these was the landmark decision last year to begin the process of elaborating a legally-binding instrument to establish global standards governing transfers of conventional weapons. New Zealand has been a strong supporter of an Arms Trade Treaty for some years now.

The gains to be made from such a Treaty will be global – as well as regional. Certainly, there is a pressing need to tackle the proliferation of conventional weapons in my region, the Pacific. I have heard what colleagues here have said about the destabilising effects of illicit weapons in their regions. The adoption and implementation of a global ATT will benefit the stability and development of all regions.

It will only do so, however, if the Treaty’s scope is broad and very comprehensive. We note, Mr Chairman, the attraction we still attach to the proposal put forward at July’s Prepcom by Norway that the coverage of the Treaty should extend to all conventional arms other than those explicitly excluded: the so-called “yes, unless” approach.

Very good progress was made at the first ATT Preparatory Conference meetings mid-way through this year, under the very able chairmanship of Ambassador Moritan. A comprehensive Chair’s text was produced on Elements, and facilitators held useful discussions, and narrowed differences, on scope, parameters, and implementation – all key features of the Treaty’s framing.

New Zealand looks forward to a further very substantive ATT Prepcom meeting in the early part of next year. We are confident that, with the assistance of the useful intersessional work being promoted by civil society, we will be well positioned to intensify work on actual drafting at next year’s Prepcoms.

Mr Chairman,

August this year saw the welcome entry-into-force of the Convention on Cluster Munitions which New Zealand ratified last December. We continue to urge all countries not yet State Parties to accelerate their own processes to ensure universalisation of this Convention. We look forward to the first Meeting of States Parties which will take place next month in one of the States most severely afflicted by these inhumane weapons: the Lao People’s Democratic Republic. Following the active role New Zealand played throughout the Oslo process, we have been pleased to continue our engagement this year as a member of the Lao Support Group in Geneva, where we have assisted the President-Designate particularly in the area of national implementation. We remain committed to working with all partners, including civil society, for a strong and robust first meeting of States Parties in order to ensure that the next, and critical, phase of implementation is
successful. New Zealand intends to be represented at this meeting at a high level, reflecting the importance we place on the Convention and this first meeting.

Both the Cluster Munitions process and text were modelled along the lines of those used for the Ottawa Anti-Personnel Landmine Convention. I note, Mr Chairman, that together, these two Treaties are exemplars of the strong humanitarian dividend possible when States combine forces with civil society - and draw on its expertise, passion and outreach.

The Second Review Conference of the Ottawa Convention late last year was an important milestone in the life of the Convention and resulted in the Cartagena Action Plan. States Parties agreed to support enhanced implementation of the Convention and pledged to push for sustainable progress on the Action Plan. As a strong advocate of the need for greater emphasis on victim assistance, New Zealand was pleased that the States Parties agreed to highlight victim assistance as a key priority for implementation in the coming years.

Mr Chairman,

Achieving further progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons is also a priority for New Zealand over the coming year. This year’s Biennial Meeting of States parties on the PoA was useful in furthering the objectives of the PoA through the identification of a number of action-oriented measures contained in the Chair’s summary which will support the full implementation of the PoA.

As Chair-designate of the next meeting in the Programme of Action cycle - the Open-Ended Meeting of Governmental Experts, to be held in New York in May next year – New Zealand (my colleague here in New York, Ambassador McLay) is working with Member States to define a format and focus for this meeting that is relevant and would serve Member States well in their practical implementation of the PoA. I would encourage all interested states to engage with us on these issues and to contribute to what we hope will be a successful meeting in May next year.