Statement by the Control Arms Coalition to the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, 25th October 2010, New York

Delivered by Anna Macdonald, Oxfam International, on behalf of the Control Arms Coalition

Excellencies, colleagues,

As many of you know, Control Arms is an international coalition of civil society organisations that has been campaigning for an Arms Trade Treaty since 2003. We have hundreds of member organizations, in all regions of the world, and we thank you for the opportunity to present our views and experience during this First Committee session.

As an alliance of humanitarian, arms control and human rights and health organizations, Control Arms members see the destructive effects of the poorly regulated trade in conventional arms every day in the communities in which we work and live around the globe. Highlighting this impact is a key role of civil society during the ATT negotiations.

We believe that an ATT must make a difference on the ground, with real impact in affected communities. There is an overwhelming humanitarian imperative that must be realized. The ATT must focus on human security, not only national security.

For almost four years now, governments have discussed what the ATT might look like. In that time, we estimate that over two million people have died as a result of armed violence. Though not a panacea, had an effective Arms Trade Treaty been in place during this period regulating the flow of arms around the world, this human tragedy would have been significantly reduced, saving lives and preventing injuries, displacement and human rights abuses.

It is very positive that preparatory negotiations have started, and that the vast majority of states are participating. The Chair’s draft principles and elements papers, which constitute the outputs of the first PrepComs, present delegates with a good basis to continue negotiations. While there are still several omissions of concern to Control Arms, we were particular encouraged that the principles paper highlights the goals and objectives of the ATT as to: "(p)revent international transfers of conventional arms that contribute to or facilitate: human suffering, serious violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, violations of UN sanctions and arms embargoes and other international obligations, armed conflict, the displacement of people, (…)"

It is worth noting that a Treaty which can achieve these ends will of necessity:
- Be of comprehensive scope; covering all conventional arms, and including ammunition, small arms, and parts and components, as well as all types of international arms transfer
- Include robust criteria, including international human rights and humanitarian law, and socio-economic development
- Include a transparent and effective implementation mechanism.

It has been extremely encouraging therefore to hear so many states calling for exactly this content during the conventional weapons debate.

That said, if an effective and robust treaty is to be achieved, the pace of progress has got to be faster, the substantive discussions have got to be deeper, and delegations have got to be resourced with appropriate technical experts for each theme under discussion.

And as many have highlighted, the time available for ATT negotiations is very tight: only two weeks of formal PrepComs remain before the 2012 negotiating conference begins. Essentially, these two remaining PrepComs must build on the current “skeleton” and develop a robust and comprehensive draft text.

Therefore, we request states to engage in energetic preparation work between now and February 28th – as beginning the development of draft treaty text is critical, so as to ensure that all states and regional groups are able to play a full and constructive role in the next round of negotiations.

Likewise, we urge all governments to maximize intersessional and other informal discussion opportunities over the next 18 months, and to take every opportunity to progress discussions on treaty content. Recently, several Control Arms colleagues participated in the productive and useful discussions of the Boston symposium on an ATT, which confirmed that these intersessional opportunities can be very valuable. The Boston meeting was also helpful in demonstrating yet again that states and civil society can constructively work together, as we were pleased to contribute as experts in the process, drawing on both technical expertise and experience from our many programs around the world.

The enormous, unacceptable and avoidable human costs of the irresponsible arms trade – and our shared desire to address them – bring us all together to work on an Arms Trade Treaty. Political will has taken the ATT from an idea dreamt up by Nobel laureates and NGOs into a formal UN negotiation process. The ATT will happen. The question is how strong will it be.

As such, that political will must be strengthened further. While it is important for the future ATT to have as wide support as possible to ensure its substantive rigor and effective implementation and enforcement, this universality will be rendered meaningless if the treaty is not robust. Universality can be achieved over time; a stronger, more effective treaty text, realistically, is a much harder task. We believe the
worst case scenario would be a “lowest common denominator” text that could be ratified by all states but would make none of their citizens safer.

While avoiding this scenario will not be easy, we are confident that it can – and must – be achieved. The Control Arms coalition is committed to a principled and robust ATT, and to work together with states as constructive partners and critics, in order to deliver a treaty in 2012 that significantly diminishes the human cost of the poorly regulated arms trade.

Thank you very much.