Statement

by

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Chair of the Group of Governmental Experts
on the continuing operation and further development
of the United Nations Standardized Instrument for
Reporting Military Expenditures

at the

First Committee
of the
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Thematic discussion on conventional weapons

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(check against delivery)
Mr Chairman,

It is an honour to be here today and to present to you the report of the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on the continuing operation and further development of the United Nations Standardized Instrument for Reporting Military Expenditures, which I had the privilege to chair. Thank you for the invitation and this opportunity.

For many years Germany has taken an interest in the issue of military expenditures. Together with Romania we have introduced the respective biennial resolution. In 2007 under Resolution 62/13 the GGE was tasked to review the operation and further development of the Standardized Instrument for Reporting Military Expenditures. The GGE had 15 members and it held three sessions, one in Geneva in November 2010 and two in New York in February and in May 2011, respectively. The Group’s consensus report was presented to the Secretary General and submitted to the General Assembly in Document A/66/89 on 14 June 2011.

Mr Chairman,

Allow me to briefly outline the course of the GGE deliberations. This has been the first review exercise since the introduction of the Standardized Instrument three decades ago. Our mandate was clear: “to review the continuing operation and further development of the United Nations Standardized Instrument for Reporting Military Expenditures.” We started out to review the operation and had very intensive discussions on all elements of the Instrument. In the course of our three one-week long meetings we gradually focused on how to further develop the Instrument. My goal was to have a consensus report at the end of our meetings.

This consensus report is in front of you, but allow me to just mention a few elements of our discussions which are also reflected in the recommendations of the report: first, there was agreement among the experts on the continuing importance of the Standardized Instrument.

Furthermore, the Group discussed the low reporting rate and inconsistent participation and there was an exchange of views on possible reasons for that.

The Group considered the existing standardized form and its simplified version and agreed to preserve the Instrument’s basic structure. At the same time, experts found that certain modifications to both forms are needed to better accommodate differences in national accounting systems for military expenditures. The standardized and simplified forms should include the same basic elements to make sure that the same total amount of military expenditures are concluded.
In addition, to encourage broader participation by states which do not possess armed or military forces, a “nil” report form was proposed. Experts also suggested that it might be useful to allow for explanatory remarks and additional factual and documentary information to be submitted by Member States in their reporting. The share of military spending in GDP might be an illustrative example.

When discussing the comparability, reliability and comprehensiveness of data provided by Member States, experts raised the question of a common definition of “military expenditures”. This was not an easy issue and I am all the more pleased to report that the Group agreed upon the common understanding that for the purpose of this Instrument, military expenditures would refer to all financial resources that a State spends on the uses and functions of its military forces. It is expected that this common understanding will allow States to better specify the nature of their military expenditures and facilitate more accurate reporting, which would provide for greater comparability of the data. I think this is an important achievement.

The group also noted the important role some regional and subregional organizations have played in the exchange of information on military expenditures, and the fact that reporting to both the United Nations and regional instruments is mutually reinforcing. The Group believed that increased cooperation between the Secretariat and relevant regional organizations, such as the AU, OAS, OSCE and UNASUR, could be a good way to promote the Instrument. I encourage delegations to raise this important matter whenever appropriate in the relevant fora and organizations. I myself, together with the Secretary of the Group from UNODA, had the privilege to do so at the OSCE in Vienna last July.

Furthermore, the Group noted the importance of leveraging existing resources of the UN disarmament machinery for promoting the Standardized Instrument and of having high-level officials of the Secretariat actively disseminate information on the Instrument by highlighting its role and importance.

In this context, the Group commended the efforts of the Secretariat, but also reflected upon the challenges for the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) regarding the transition from the basic provision of information to a user-friendly web-based platform with its particular maintenance and capacity-building needs. The Group acknowledged that the enhanced management of the Instrument depends on Member States providing adequate extra-budgetary resources for the Secretariat to execute such tasks. My government stands ready to contribute to this end.
Finally, the Group agreed that in order to ensure the continued relevance and effective operation of the Instrument, it would be helpful to periodically review its operation with a view to better adapting it to new security challenges and developments. Experts suggested that as a first step, a follow-up GGE could be convened in five years to assess the implementation of the recommendations made in 2011.

Mr. Chairman,

The Group believes that its key recommendations, namely the modifications to the reporting system under the new name “United Nations Report on Military Expenditures”, the common understanding of military expenditures, as well as the establishment of a process for periodic review, will facilitate broader participation in and increased effectiveness of the Instrument. This will ensure its relevance and operation in years to come. I encourage all delegations to join efforts towards strengthening the implementation of this vital and renewed instrument of global transparency.

In closing, I would like to thank the members of the Group for their very constructive approach and their individual contributions to the work process, which allowed the Group to come to substantive conclusions and recommendations. It was a real pleasure and honour to chair this Group and to work constructively with experts from many different member states and different backgrounds.

I also wish to express the appreciation and the gratitude of the Group for the support received from the United Nations Secretariat. I would first like to mention Mr. Sergio Duarte, the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs who also addressed the Group during its May session. In addition, I would like to acknowledge the support of Daniel Prins and the members of his branch. In particular, it is my special pleasure to thank the two persons who supported me most throughout this whole process in an excellent manner. The first one is Yuriy Kryvonos, who served as Secretary of the Group. It is fair to say – on behalf of all members of the GGE – that without him the Group would not have been able to work itself through a vast amount of material in only three weeks. The second one is Bengt-Göran Bergstrand, who as the Consultant of the Group provided excellent analytical and statistical papers. His grasp of the issue is really impressive and he had the answers to many questions of the experts during our discussions.

Thank you for your attention.