Statement to First Committee
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Mr Chairman, distinguished delegates, I am very pleased to have the opportunity today to speak to you on the subject of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). Our message is simple. Your work is urgent and doable. The Control Arms Coalition will continue to assist and to push, where needed, to see that a treaty is negotiated next July that is robust, comprehensive, and will protect lives and livelihoods of people around the globe.

Despite the occasional scepticism, we have been struck by the more prevalent sense of optimism reflected in this room during the conventional weapons debate. Many states have articulated not only a desire to achieve the goal of negotiating a robust and effective ATT, but have signalled their strong commitment to making this happen next July. We have also been encouraged by the support that many states have expressed for the chair of the ATT Preparatory process, Ambassador Roberto García Moritán of Argentina and for the draft papers that he has prepared. We too welcome his leadership and his papers as an excellent basis for proceeding to the negotiating phase of the ATT.

In particular, we have been pleased at the comprehensive nature of the draft prepared by Ambassador Moritán. The draft criteria reflect the need that the legitimate trade in arms should do nothing to undermine international humanitarian law or human rights. It also reflects a need not to trade in arms to the detriment of socio-economic development in buyer states. The chair’s draft includes small arms and light weapons, as well as ammunition, elements without which the treaty will not minimally fulfill its objectives.

However, this is not to say that the Control Arms Coalition views the current Chair’s paper as perfect, for it can certainly be improved. As Amnesty International documented in a report released last week, the mass protests that have gripped the Middle East and North Africa region since late 2010 have brought sharply into focus the appalling human rights records of many governments in the MENA region, and have highlighted the impact of the sale and supply of arms to those very same governments. Worryingly, in the Chair’s draft text, the types of arms falling within the scope of the Treaty could exclude much of the weaponry, munitions and related equipment that has been used and is being used by security forces in the MENA region. Such an omission would make the final treaty significantly less robust and relevant.

We believe that the requirements in the draft text for transparency and reporting should be also strengthened. The illegitimate arms trade, the diversion of arms, the illicit trade to terrorists and criminals – these all flourish in an atmosphere of secrecy. Corrupt arms deals are also facilitated by a lack of openness. Truly effective transparency and reporting mechanisms are essential if the ATT is to meet its goals as a humanitarian treaty, while allowing legitimate transfers to go ahead.
While the reasons for a robust ATT may feel distant when sitting in this conference room, this very minute only thirty blocks away a legal case is unfolding that shows the urgent need to conclude a global agreement regulating the international trade in arms. Viktor Bout is alleged to have trafficked weapons that have fuelled civil wars across the globe over the past two-plus decades. Those actions deserve examination in a courtroom, but his trial is unrelated to them, in part because the current international system is broken. A robust ATT should and must lead to all countries adopting arms brokering and arms trade laws, closing the legal loopholes that currently let the black market thrive.

The Control Arms Coalition will continue to campaign for a robust ATT that will put humanitarian and human rights issues at its heart, and look forward to participating fully in the remaining Prepcom and in the 2012 negotiating conference. We are happy to put at your service our long experience in this field, and the expertise we have collectively accumulated. Civil society and UN member states have worked together to build many effective international agreements, and we will be happy to do the same in 2012, when the world will have an historic opportunity to agree a Treaty that can make a difference to the lives of millions of people around the world.

Thank you.