STATEMENT
BY
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GOVERNMENTAL EXPERTS ON THE UNITED NATIONS
REGISTER OF CONVENTIONAL ARMS

TO THE
FIRST COMMITTEE
CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS CLUSTER
DEBATE

NEW YORK
24 OCTOBER 2013

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Mr Chairman,

Since this is the first time that I am taking the floor in the context of this briefing, allow me to congratulate you on your appointment as Chairperson of the First Committee and to extend similar congratulations to the members of your Bureau. We have seen that you have thus far guided our deliberations with great success.

Mr Chairman,

At the outset, as Chair of the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on the continuing operation of the United Nations Register on Conventional Arms and its further development, it would be remiss of me to express my thanks to my predecessor in this position, Ambassador Roberto Garcia Moritan of Argentina, who has left a huge mark on the work of previous GGEs over the past ten years. It has been an enormous challenge to live up to the work that he managed to achieve.

Mr Chairman,

By its decision 66/39 of 2 December 2011, the General Assembly requested a group of governmental experts to prepare a report on the continuing operation of the United Nations Register on Conventional Arms and its further development, taking into account the work of the Conference for Disarmament, relevant deliberations within the United Nations, the views expressed by Member States and reports of the Secretary-General on the continuing operation of the Register and its further development, with a view to taking a decision at its sixty-eighth session. I have the honour to transmit herewith this report.

As the Committee is aware, fifteen Member States were appointed to the Group, which held three sessions; the first in Geneva from 8 – 12 April 2013, the second and third in New York respectively from 6 – 10 May and 24 – 28 June 2013.

These regular triennial reviews of the Register’s operation serve the important purpose of assessing the Register’s successes, identifying its shortfalls and improving its effectiveness. The fact that the triennial review was postponed and only took place four years after the 2009 GGE is a result of a rather full 2012 UN conventional arms calendar.

Mr Chairman,

During these three sessions, a divergent number of views were raised both within the context of the Register’s relevance, its universality and of its further development. As with previous GGEs, this Group agreed that the Register remains to be an important global measure to strengthen and improve confidence-building amongst States.

However, while previous GGEs have recognised that the Register was the only global transparency measure on conventional arms transfers, developments over the past months have contributed to in transforming this picture. This GGE’s deliberations took place against the backdrop of the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). While it can be argued that the ATT is more of an arms control instrument than merely a confidence-building measure, its adoption nonetheless has and will continue to have a direct impact on the operation of the Register.

Mr Chairman,

The report contains an analysis of the issues that were under consideration. The most concerning issue was the downward trend in reporting to the Register, with it reaching a mere 52 national reports
submitted in 2012. The GGE considered the issue of raising awareness on the Register as a transparency and confidence-building measure amongst States, the need to build capacity on reporting, the issue of general reporting fatigue, but most of all the decline in the submission of “nil” reports and means of encouraging States to submit these. As far as universalising the Register is concerned, the Group expressed the view that the Secretariat plays a crucial role in maintaining and promoting the Register and that its capacity to do so needs to be enhanced.

The Group also considered at length the modification of the categories on combat aircraft and attack helicopters to include unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). While such reporting is implicit in the Register, a direct reference to include these proved to be elusive. Similarly, a proposal for including a standardised reporting form for the submission of voluntary information on military holdings and on procurement through national production, innocuous as it may seem to some, could not command consensus in the Group.

Mr Chairman,

The main issue that successive GGEs have grappled with for more than a decade has been the inclusion of small arms and light weapons as an eighth category of the Register. This is no secret and has been referred to in Ambassador Moritan’s previous reports on the GGEs that he chaired. Some may have thought that the successful outcome of the 2012 Second Review Conference on the implementation of the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons may have provided an impetus to this debate. However, this again proved not to be the case. The excessive accumulation, uncontrolled spread and destabilising effect of these weapons around the world is an issue that affects developing countries, including Africa and its exclusion in the Register, in my opinion, remains a serious concern. The consideration of including small arms and light weapons in the Register by the 2016 GGE was a specific recommendation that was made by the Group.

Mr Chairman,

The Group was also of the view that future GGEs should be geographically more representative. A case in point was that my country was the only one from Africa that was represented on the GGE, while my regional group constitutes more than a quarter of the membership of the United Nations.

On a positive note, Mr Chairman, it is satisfying to note that thus far, 61 States have submitted their national reports for 2012. I wish to highlight that our concern as a GGE on the participation in the Register was expressed in appending to our report an illustrative list of measures that we felt could promote reporting to the Register. It is my hope that Member States will take into cognisance some of these suggestions.

In conclusion, Mr Chairman, the international community is faced with many challenges relating to the maintenance of peace and security, amongst others on my own continent. I submit to the membership the present report of the GGE in my capacity as Chair in my belief that the Register remains as relevant as ever as a transparency measure and in addressing the threats posed to us all.

I thank you.