SURINAME

Statement
on behalf of the Member States of the
Union of South American Nations
(UNASUR)

by Mr. Michiel Raafenberg,
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on Conventional Weapons
in the Thematic Debate of the First Committee,
68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

28 October 2013
Mr. Chairman,

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the Member States of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR).

Member States of UNASUR recognize the contribution and qualitative difference made by the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Aspects (PoA), to providing a comprehensive and multidimensional response to the problems arising from these illicit activities. Nevertheless, we remain concerned about the effects of illicit production, transfer and circulation of firearms and ammunition, and their uncontrolled spread in the hands of civilians, which, in many regions, have various consequences and pose a challenge to the sustainable development of our societies. We also reiterate our concern at the close link that exists between the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and organized crime.

The effective implementation of the Programme of Action is a matter of high and urgent priority for UNASUR.

We consider it important to continue promoting the consolidation of international cooperation and assistance and national capacity-building, as their cross-cutting and multidimensional nature make them essential tools for the effective implementation of the measures recommended in the Program of Action. While we recognize the contribution made by the Program of Action, UNASUR States wish to reiterate the position stated on previous occasions regarding the PoA, namely that by referring to the issue of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons “in all its aspects”, it must necessarily include ammunition and explosives. We therefore consider that one of the remaining challenges for the implementation of the Programme of Action is the comprehensive consideration of the issue. UNASUR States consider ammunition to be an integral part of small arms and light weapons, which also include explosives. We have also reiterated that the non-legally binding nature of the Programme of Action is also an obstacle to its effective implementation.

Mr. Chairman,

Member States of UNASUR consider that the central role of the Programme of Action in the field of small arms and light weapons makes it necessary to have a close and continued follow-up of its implementation by the international community.
In that regard, while welcoming the positive outcome achieved during the Second Review Conference to examine the Programme of Action, through the consensual adoption of the final document, the Member States of UNASUR look forward to the convening of the Fifth Biennial Meeting of States, to be held in New York from 16 to 20 of June 2014. In our view, the BMS5 will constitute an excellent opportunity to deepen our discussions on international cooperation and assistance and on marking, record-keeping and tracing in the framework of the International Tracing Instrument.

Taking into account the primary responsibility of States in the prevention, combat and eradication of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects across borders, in the framework of MERCOSUR, a Working Group on Fire Arms and Ammunition of Member and Associated States of MERCOSUR was established in 2001 with the aim of sharing national experiences, work in the harmonization of national legislation to control firearms and ammunitions, as well as to coordinate policies in the field. This forum of exchange has become a useful tool for the coordination of the positions of Member and Associated States.

In this context, UNASUR welcomes the deposit by Ecuador and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in September 2013, of the respective instruments of ratification of the Protocol Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Further to this agenda item, Member States of UNASUR express their support to Colombia, South Africa and Japan for their annual initiative to introduce the draft resolution entitled “The Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects”.

Mr. Chairman,

Along the same lines, Member States of UNASUR underscore the need to address the issues related to the unregulated trade in conventional arms and its diversion to the illicit market.

Last April, the Arms Trade Treaty was adopted by the General Assembly. UNASUR expects that this first legally binding instrument on the arms trade, can contribute to provide an effective response to the serious consequences that the illicit and non-regulated arms trade and trafficking poses for many people and States, in particular through the diversion of arms to unauthorized non-state actors or users, often linked to transitional organized crime and drug trafficking. It is expected that this Treaty can contribute to the prevention of armed conflict, armed violence and violations of international law, including international human rights
instruments and international humanitarian law. At the same time, in anticipation of the entry into force of this Treaty, UNASUR calls for the Treaty to be implemented in a balanced, transparent and objective manner that respects the sovereign right of all States to guarantee their self-defense, in accordance with article 51 of the United Nations Charter.

Mr. Chairman,

Member States of UNASUR reiterate their support to the efforts of the international community to regulate Cluster Munitions, with the purpose to significantly reduce the humanitarian, social and economic consequences of the use of these weapons to civilians, in accordance with international humanitarian law. In this regard, the Plurinational State of Bolivia deposited the instrument of ratification on the Convention on Cluster Munitions last April.

Likewise, UNASUR Member States reaffirm the need to eliminate anti-personnel mines. In that regard, they highlight the efforts, as well as the results in the field of demining and victims assistance of anti-personnel mines in the region, which has been possible because of the existing cooperation among our countries, like the case of joint demining of Peru and Ecuador and by Peru and Chile. We also highlight the international assistance given by countries of the region for demining, such as the assistance given by Brazil in South and Central America.

Member States of UNASUR attach utmost importance to the consideration of international cooperation and assistance in the framework of the Ottawa Convention. In this regard, they welcome the fact that a relatively greater time will be given for a more in-depth discussion on this issue and on means to increase resource mobilization in this regard during the 13th Meeting of States Parties, to take place in Geneva from 2 to 5 of December 2013.

Mr. Chairman,

Member States of UNASUR reiterate the importance of continuing to promote an enabling environment for arms control and limitation of conventional weapons, which allow each Member State to devote more resources to their economic and social development, taking into consideration the compliance with the international commitments and their legitimate defense and security needs.
Mr. Chairman,

In the Special Meeting of Heads of State and Government of UNASUR in Bariloche, Argentina, on 28th August 2009, the Heads of State and Government decided to strengthen South America as a zone of peace, committing to the establishment of a mechanism of mutual confidence in the field of security and defense, upholding their decision to refrain from the threat or the use of force against the territorial integrity of another State of UNASUR.

Likewise, they reaffirmed the commitment to strengthening the fight and the cooperation against terrorism and transnational organized crime and their related crimes: drug trafficking, the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons, as well as the rejection of the presence or action of illegal armed groups. In addition, they reaffirmed that the presence of foreign military forces could not, with its means and resources related to its own objectives, threaten the sovereignty and territorial integrity of any South American nation and consequently, the peace and security of the region.

As a follow-up of that decision, the South American Defense Council decided to establish the Mechanism to Implement Confidence and Security Building Measures, including the development and improvement of national systems for marking and tracing of weapons as well as active cooperation among Member States of UNASUR in the solution of cases of diversion, smuggling and illegal use of weapons under their custody or from their territory.

Likewise, with the purpose of promoting transparency in military expenditures, UNASUR launched in May 2012 the South-American Register on Defense Expenditures, compiling for the first time official information by the 12 UNASUR Member States, based on a common agreed methodology developed for that effect.

Finally, Mr. President, by means of the "Declaration on South America as a Zone of Peace", adopted in December 2012, the Heads of State and Government of UNASUR affirmed their resolve to undertake actions with a view to establishing South America as a zone free of anti-personnel landmines and to continue to negotiate a Protocol on Peace, Security and Cooperation within the framework of the South American Defense Council.

Thank you.