Statement on behalf of the Delegation of the Republic of Latvia

Thematic Debate on Conventional Weapons

First Committee of the 68th UN General Assembly

New York, 30 October 2013

Mr. Chairman,

Latvia fully aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier on behalf of the European Union.

The international community is showing increasing awareness of the threats posed by illicit trafficking of conventional weapons, including Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). Some even compare these weapons to the weapons of mass destruction. While we should keep technically clear distinction between the two categories, it’s important to note that illegitimate use of conventional weapons, indeed, causes enough violence and destruction in various parts of the world to be regarded as one of the most serious security challenges of our time. In addition, the close links between illicit trafficking of weapons and drugs, as well as other organized criminal activities and terrorism, are well known.

Latvia, along with the majority of the international community, salutes the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). We regard it as an outstanding achievement, which has rewarded long and tireless efforts aimed at establishing a common and legally binding regulation for the international arms trade. Latvia was among the countries which signed the treaty on 3rd of June 2013. Currently the national procedure of its ratification is under way. The ATT has a great potential to increase peace and security in the daily lives of millions of civilians, therefore we encourage all states to contribute to the treaty’s entry into force without delay.

The success of the adoption of the ATT does not diminish the importance of other instruments in the field of conventional arms control. Hence, we should continue to examine ways to improve their effectiveness. United Nations Program of Action (PoA) to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in SALW in all its aspects is one such major tool in our disposal. We welcome its successful second review conference in 2012 and the adoption of the outcome document by consensus. Let me reiterate our commitment to the further development of the PoA. Latvia robustly implements program’s provisions and shares its best practice through the voluntary reports.

We would also like to express our full support to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, as well as its review by the group of governmental experts this year. Only a living and up-to-date instrument can suit our needs in the rapidly changing international environment. We note the tendency of declining national reporting to the register, and encourage all states to submit their annual reports, including the voluntary reports on SALW. Universal adherence to
confidence building measures, such as the Register, is one of preconditions for closer and more effective international cooperation on the matters of conventional arms control.

Mr. Chairman,

Latvia underscores the importance of international mechanisms which establish provisions and help to coordinate actions to curb illicit trade of conventional weapons, including SALW. However, it remains national responsibility to enforce effective control over transfers of goods for military purposes. Latvia, in many aspects, has taken these measures to a higher level than any international instrument would require. We believe that implementing additional procedures in the field of export control is beneficial for strengthening our national as well as international security.

Let me point out a few examples. Firstly, Latvian laws prescribe that a transit or brokering license is required for every single transfer of dual-use or military equipment, including import, export or transit. This ensures control over all transfers of goods of strategic significance and helps to control re-export. Secondly, Latvian customs officers have received specialized training on identification of dual-use and military equipment in 2012 and 2013. All customs brokers and customs declarants have to pass an introduction course on export control of strategic goods before they get certified. Last but not least, a seminar on dual-use equipment was organized in 2012 for Latvian exporters and transport companies to facilitate industry outreach.

These are just a few steps which Latvia has taken in order to invigorate the control over transfers of strategic goods through our territory. It should be noted that these measures are relevant not only regarding transfers of conventional arms, as they also strengthen our capabilities to prevent potential WMD-related trafficking.

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to conclude by affirming Latvia's readiness to contribute to all efforts aimed at containing the illicit flows of conventional weapons, which fuel disastrous armed conflicts around the world. During the last decades Latvia has gained substantial experience that could be useful for other states which currently are building their capacity in the field of export control. We are willing to share our knowledge and experience with interested states through consultations, seminars or other suitable activities.

Thank you.