THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND

STATEMENT ON CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS

to the

72nd UNGA First Committee

New York, 20th October 2017

Please check against delivery
Mr / Mme chairperson,

At the outset allow me to align my comments with the statement made by the European Union; I would now like to add some remarks in a national capacity.

Mr Chairman / Madam Chair,

The United Kingdom remains committed to playing a leading role in international efforts on conventional arms control across the full range of issues and in support of the various instruments and arrangements. These are designed to deliver greater global security. For these instruments to function effectively, it is vital that they receive the necessary support, especially financial, so we encourage all participating States to the various conventional weapons conventions to pay their contributions at the earliest opportunity as the UK has done.

The United Kingdom is a strong supporter of the Arms Trade Treaty as the primary means to achieving a globally well-regulated, legal trade in arms and reducing their diversion to the illicit market. We all know that illicitly traded arms are used to fuel terrorism, crime, the illicit trade in wildlife and threaten human security and development.

Universalisation, especially getting the right states around the table, must remain a priority until the Treaty is truly global. Greater participation will increase the Treaty's influence, strength and reputation, allowing it to achieve its principal aims. The UK encourages all States which have not yet done so to make ratification or accession a national priority. We welcome the participation of non State Parties at the CSPs as a signal of their interest and potential involvement in this important discussion.

The Treaty cannot make an impact unless and until it is effectively and widely implemented. The UK will continue to offer technical expertise and financial assistance, where possible, to States looking to implement the Treaty and develop their export control systems. Over the past year, we have provided £311,000 to the Voluntary Trust Fund.
We also welcome the engagement by regional organisations, civil society groups, industry and academia and continue to support the equal participation of women in the field of disarmament and arms control.

Mr Chairman / Madam Chair,

The United Kingdom strongly believes in the fundamental humanitarian goals of the respective Conventions on Cluster Munitions and the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban. We are concerned that the number of new cluster munitions casualties in 2016 was more than double the number recorded for 2015 and call on all states to abide by International Humanitarian Law. We call on states not already party to these Conventions to accede without delay.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. To mark this milestone, the UK has tripled its financial support for mine action programmes - providing £100million over the next three years, to help 800,000 people live their lives free from the threat of mines. Over 100,000 people – especially children – will benefit from mine risk awareness education.

Furthermore, the UK strongly upholds its obligations under the Treaty, as demonstrated by the ongoing work to remove anti-personnel mines from the Falkland Islands. We will provide an update on this work at the Meeting of States Parties in December.

Just as the UK works hard to repair the legacy of past conflicts, we are ready and willing to discuss potential future challenges. The UK attaches great importance to the UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) and underscores the importance of universalisation and full implementation of its restrictions / prohibitions to prevent further harm to civilians. The Convention plays a key role in bringing together states with differing national security needs and concerns and in balancing military necessity with humanitarian concerns. Hence, the CCW is the right forum to continue to respect and reinforce the principles of International Humanitarian Law.
As Chair of the Convention this year, the UK will do its utmost to ensure a successful and forward leaning outcome at the meeting of High Contracting Parties in November.

Turning now to Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems. The UK believes that LAWS do not and may never exist and, under our definition, any such system would fall foul of IHL. However, we recognise the need for this discussion. The CCW has a crucial role to play in this regard, given its wealth of technical, military and diplomatic expertise. We support the mandate given by CCW to the GGE on LAWS and look forward to further discussions in November.

Mr Chairman / Madam Chair,

The UK remains fully committed to the fight against illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition. We look forward to the Third Review Conference on the implementation of the UN Programme of Action and the International Tracing Instrument next year.

These instruments provide a useful framework for addressing the SALW problem, and should be underpinned by a concrete implementation plan to tackle shared challenges in priority areas.

Mr Chairman / Madam Chair,

In conclusion, the UK full recognises the growing challenges we all face, the threats posed to life and security. We also recognise that international co-operation and the effective operation of a rules based international system are our best hope of tackling these threats. Therefore universalisation and implementation of these treaties and conventions are a core means of building a safer world.