THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

OPENING STATEMENT

By

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Head of Delegation
to the

UNITED NATIONS ARMS TRADE TREATY FINAL CONFERENCE

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Please check against delivery
Thank you Mr President.

First, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment as the President of this Conference and to assure you of the United Kingdom’s full and active cooperation over the coming weeks.

Mr President,

Last July, we had four weeks to agree a text. It was a tall order. It was through the sheer dedication of the Governments represented in this room - over long nights and even longer weekends - that we came as close as we did to securing an Arms Trade Treaty.

At the start of the last Conference, we spoke about the world’s responsibility to reach agreement. We reflected on a ten year campaign that brought together civil society, industry and governments from every region of the world.

That campaign is as relevant today as it was when we embarked on the United Nations process in 2006. The human cost of the poorly-regulated trade of arms is still too high. We have a duty to prevent conflict and protect innocent civilians by placing human rights and international humanitarian law at the forefront of globally-agreed standards for the international arms trade.

We must also acknowledge the need to protect a legitimate industry. By establishing a baseline for robust controls, we ensure that countries can defend their citizens without undermining human development.

An enormous amount of time has been invested – in capitals and here at the United Nations - by the diplomats and campaigners who have spared no effort to fulfil the promise of that first resolution.

We are now closer than ever to achieving our aim. Last July’s Conference was just one step on our path to an Arms Trade Treaty. We must redouble our efforts and strain every sinew to ensure that our journey will end nine days from now.

Fortunately, we are not starting from scratch. We have your predecessor’s draft text to work from. A lot will be said over the next two weeks about the inadequacies of that text. We will talk about the loopholes and the gaps. And it is right that we do. The United Kingdom will not sign a
weak Treaty. But we will not allow work towards improvement unravel what has already been achieved. A perfect piece of paper will not save lives. For this Treaty to be effective, we need to negotiate as if implementation matters. We have the opportunity to craft a strong text that the majority of states – including the major exporters of arms – can and will implement. This is how we will make a difference.

Mr President,

We remain convinced that the Arms Trade Treaty should cover all conventional arms, their munitions and parts and components, and that it should be future-proofed against changes in technology. We want Articles three and four of the draft Treaty to ensure that arms are not exported when there is a clear risk of serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. We want to improve the transparency of the arms trade by introducing mandatory public reporting. We want to do more to tackle diversion to the illicit market. And we will continue to call for the Treaty to play its part in addressing gender-based violence. Violence against women and girls is one of the most systematic, widespread human rights violations in the world, which is why it is not only one of our priorities for the Arms Trade Treaty but also for our G8 presidency.

But we are also proud of what was achieved in July. We must not lose sight of the progress this text would represent, whether by introducing legally-binding controls on small arms and light weapons or through measures to prevent corruption, end gender-based violence and promote sustainable development. We must protect what we fought for in July.

Mr President,

The United Kingdom is here to finish the job. We may not all get everything we want over the next two weeks. But we will spare no effort to find the best, most workable solutions around which we can build consensus.

Mr President,
We are on the cusp of an historic moment. As the Foreign Secretary, William Hague, has said –

"This is the prize on offer ..... History will not forgive those who seek to prevent it and we will not rest until we have secured it."

An Arms Trade Treaty is finally within our reach, so carpe diem – we must seize this day.

Thank you