Statement by H.E. Archbishop Francis Chullikatt
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United Nations Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty

New York, 2 – 27 July 2012
Mr. President,

In spite of the rocky start experienced in the opening days of this Conference, and notwithstanding our strong reservations with that process and its outcome, let me assure you of my delegation’s commitment to establishing a strong, effective and credible ATT.

While my Delegation still remains opposed to the status accorded to it during this process, we wish to express appreciation to many delegations who have conveyed, both publicly and privately, their support for the proper recognition of our rights in this Conference. My Delegation’s abiding support for addressing illicit flows of arms is evidenced by the willingness, for the sake of the Conference, to move forward with this process, despite our objections. While the participation of Observer States in international conferences has long been a vital practice of this Organization, we are confident that our readiness to set aside our concerns will begin a process of countries working to set aside their own concerns for that of the common good of all of society.

The Holy See continues to believe that an Arms Trade Treaty can make an important difference for millions of people confronted with insecurity, deprivation and fear linked to the unregulated and irresponsible transfer of arms and ammunition, and the illicit acquisition of such by criminal and non-state actors. The treaty would help also in the promotion of a world more respectful of human life and human dignity.

Within this perspective, the Holy See wishes to reiterate the view that the core objective of the Treaty is not merely the regulation of the conventional arms trade but it is, above all, the disarming of the international illicit market. This needs to be underlined, so as to place the human person at the center of the ATT.

The ATT debate gave us the opportunity to point out once again the pernicious impact of the illicit arms trade on development, peace, humanitarian law and human rights. Arms cannot simply be compared with other goods exchanged in global or domestic markets to promote unscrupulously economic and commercial interests. They need a specialised regulation, one capable of preventing, combating and eradicating the irresponsible and illicit trade of conventional arms and related items. This effort calls for the involvement of all members of the international community: States and international organisations, NGOs and the private sector. All of them are responsible for promoting an interrelated action aimed at the “establishment and maintenance of international peace and security with the least diversion for armaments of the world’s human and economic resources” (cfr. Art. 26 of the UN Charter).
Mr President,

In light of the above, the Holy See wishes to emphasize that, in order to be strong, effective and credible, the ATT should:

- Recall among its basic principles: respect for human dignity and human life, peace and security, development and fundamental human rights, which are essential for collective security.
- Have a broad scope, comprising not only the 7 categories considered by the UN Registry of Conventional Arms, but also small arms and light weapons and their respective ammunition, as well as the trading and licensing of technologies involved in their production.
- Maintain in the criteria of application references to human rights, humanitarian law and development; at the same time, the ATT should identify language that limits subjective possibilities for political abuse, corruption and manipulation and that specifies modalities for the application of such criteria.
- Promote and reinforce international cooperation and assistance between States. This encompasses basic elements for improving relationships of trust between States as well as facilitating a correct implementation even on the part of States with less capacity for gathering and maintaining data for the preparation of reports and for the improvement of transparency in the arms trade, all of central importance for the effectiveness of the Treaty.
- Provide strong and credible mechanisms for reviewing and updating the Treaty, in order to incorporate expeditiously new developments in the framework of the ATT, which must be open to possible future technological developments.
- Retain and strengthen provisions regarding victim assistance, by pushing States parties to offer or receive assistance for the care, rehabilitation and social and economic reintegration of the victims of armed conflict.

Mr President,

Although the above-mentioned elements are all of fundamental importance for a strong and credible ATT, my delegation would like to draw attention to the last point, concerning the provisions relating to assistance for victims, which must be maintained, and if possible, strengthened.

In order to reinforce the provisions, we need to underline that more effective assistance for victims can be achieved by promoting a process focused on the reduction of the
number of victims through the intensification of the prevention of illicit arms proliferation and a reduction in the overall trade in arms which fuels conflicts and instability and impedes the course of development and peace. In such direction, the ATT not only should be focused on the supply-side of the arms trade, but the ATT needs to provide some elements relating to the demand-side for arms, which often feeds the illicit market.

From this perspective, it seems appropriate that the ATT should note the need to prevent illicit arms proliferation by reducing the demand for arms through educational initiatives and public awareness programs involving all sectors of society, including religious organizations, for the sake of promoting a culture of peace and opposing a culture of criminality and violence. Additionally, the Treaty must establish mechanisms to curtail irresponsible and destabilizing arms transfers. Such transfers fuel or perpetuate conflict, can often be identified as clearly intended for use against civilian populations or even violate existing Security Council resolutions.

Each State party in a position to do so may offer or receive assistance for the care, rehabilitation and social and economic reintegration of the victims of armed conflict, as well as for promoting the aforementioned educative and public awareness programs. Such assistance need not be solely technical or material in nature but also humanitarian and can be provided, inter alia, through the United Nations system, through international, regional, sub-regional or national organizations, through non-governmental organizations, or on a bilateral basis, as appropriate.

For its side the Holy See will not spare any effort to implement and promote activities aimed at spreading a culture of peace and contrasting a culture of criminality and violence through educative and public awareness programs.

Mr President,

A true culture of peace requires that the ATT addresses both the supply and the demand side of arms trade, through close cooperation between States, in responsible partnership with the arms industry and in committed solidarity with civil society. Viewed in this light, current efforts to adopt a strong and effective ATT could represent a meaningful sign of the political will of nations and governments to ensure peace, justice, stability and prosperity in the world.

Thank you, Mr. President.