2 July 2012

National Statement on the Occasion of the Arms Trade Treaty Conference

Statement by Senator the Hon Bob Carr
Minister for Foreign Affairs

(Check against delivery)

Mr President

Congratulations on your appointment as President of this Conference. Australia greatly appreciates your leadership during the preparatory stages of an Arms Trade Treaty.

Australia looks forward to continuing to work with you and all Member States during the next four weeks of negotiations.

Mr President

Irresponsible and illegal trade in arms is a chronic cause of profound human suffering.

Ten years ago tens of thousands of AK47 assault rifles were transported into Liberia in violation of the UN arms embargo. These weapons were used to commit the most terrible crimes by young boys forced to kill.

In this and other conflicts, small arms and light weapons have become weapons of mass destruction.

More recently, conventional weapons including tanks were transported into South Sudan on helicopters by unscrupulous arms dealers, allowing intensification of conflict in a part of the world that has already suffered more than most, preventing growth and progress in this newest member of the UN.

In our region, the Asia Pacific, Solomon Islands has shown just how serious the unregulated transfer of illicit firearms can be.
Before the Australian-led regional assistance mission turned things around, illicit firearms had ignited ethnic tensions and exacerbated internal conflict, with drastic impacts on economic development.

The presence of illegal arms in communities starts and prolongs conflict. Women and children are all too frequently and disproportionately affected.

The conflicts these weapons perpetuate destroy economic and social development and entrench poverty. Oxfam has estimated that the conflicts fuelled by imported weapons cost Africa up to $18 billion a year.

On top of all this, illegal arms facilitate other social threats, including organized crime, gang warfare and terrorism.

We cannot allow the catastrophic impact of this irresponsible trade to continue, especially when we know a major cause – the inadequate control of the trade in conventional arms – and we know that we can do something to fix it.

Already some States have taken action.

But the problem is global in nature and requires a global solution.

This is why we are pursuing a strong and effective Arms Trade Treaty.

We need an ATT that establishes the highest possible international standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional arms; that would promote much needed accountability and transparency in the global arms trade.

The agreement must be comprehensive. It is crucial that an ATT covers all conventional weapons – including small arms and light weapons, and their ammunition.

It must have strong criteria on which to assess arms exports, and clear, implementable provisions for national control systems.

We recognise these are issues on which differences remain.

Mr President

Australia is proud to have been at the core of the group of countries advocating for an ATT, and we intend to see this process through.

It matters to Australia that an ATT is effective for both developed and developing countries alike.

Every State has a stake in the outcome of these negotiations.
This is why Australia has been pleased to work with many others to ensure broad participation in the process to date.

We sponsored workshops in the three regions where an ATT would make a real difference – the Pacific, Caribbean and Africa.

Australia is also sponsoring nearly 50 delegates from some 35 developing countries to participate in this Conference.

We also recognise that the Treaty will present implementation challenges for many countries – this must not present an obstacle to a strong outcome.

Those in a position to do so should provide technical assistance and capacity building to ensure all countries have the ability to implement the Treaty.

Australia will provide such assistance, and today I am announcing that we will provide $1 million to initiate a multilateral assistance fund to help developing countries implement the Treaty.

This support would help in putting in place legislation, establishing export control agencies and building expertise to assess and enforce arms transfer decisions.

Mr President

A remarkable aspect of these negotiations is the strong readiness by the vast majority of States to achieve a robust Arms Trade Treaty at this Conference.

We are determined to achieve a substantive outcome at this meeting.

We are not interested in a further process of negotiation. Any delay means more lives lost.

The Preparatory Committee meetings have positioned us well – they have brought us to a solid understanding of our varied positions on the components of the Treaty.

I urge all countries present here to aim for a strong and forward looking treaty, one which upholds the security and humanitarian objectives of our mandate and benefits all countries present in this great hall today.

Thank you.