Statement

by
H.E. Ambassador Dr. Peter Wittig
Permanent Representative of Germany
to the United Nations

at the

High-level Segment of the United Nations Conference

on the

Arms Trade Treaty

6 July 2012

(check against delivery)
Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

My delegation fully aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union.

I would like to express our profound satisfaction to see you, Ambassador Moritán, chairing this UN Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty. Your hard and tireless work as Chair of the Group of Governmental Experts, the Open-ended Working Group and finally the Preparatory Committee for an Arms Trade Treaty has significantly contributed to laying the ground for this Conference. Due to your relentless efforts an Arms Trade Treaty is within reach.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The next four weeks offer a historic opportunity to bring about an Arms Trade Treaty that will make a real difference. Let us join our efforts to make this Conference a positive entry in the history books of the United Nations.

Since the outset of this process, Germany has been campaigning for a strong and robust international Arms Trade Treaty. The absence of international standards for trade in conventional arms comes with negative and far-reaching consequences. Every year millions of people around the world suffer from the direct and indirect effects of the poorly regulated arms trade and the illicit trafficking of arms. Hundreds of thousands of human beings are being killed or injured. The daily threat for humanity is imminent and growing. There is a clear case for governments to act now.

We believe that the trade in conventional arms urgently requires more and appropriate regulation on a global scale. We are not arguing in favour of prohibiting such trade. An Arms Trade Treaty should not and will not be a disarmament treaty. However, an Arms Trade Treaty will be instrumental in rendering more legitimacy, more security and more responsibility to the international trade in arms. That is why such a Treaty must set the highest
common standards for the regulation of the international arms trade. It should also enjoy the support of all relevant stakeholders.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Germany’s views on a future Arms Trade Treaty are formed by our own experience with implementing national as well as European rules on arms transfers. We would like to convince partners at the United Nations of the added value of such rules.

States enjoy their undisputed right to acquire the means in order to protect their citizens. Unlike other types of goods, arms have particular features that make them potentially dangerous. For that exact reason we are convinced that States have the responsibility to ensure the proper use of arms: arms must not be used in a way that is inconsistent with human rights and international humanitarian law. In addition, their uncontrolled proliferation and concentration can have highly destabilizing consequences that have to be averted. In sum, arms have to be traded responsibly!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Germany will spare no efforts to negotiate an Arms Trade Treaty that is robust, practicable and effective. At the same time it must be comprehensive and legally binding. Last but not least, such a Treaty requires high standards for export licence decision-making.

I would like to stress three points in this regard. First, in terms of the elements I mentioned earlier – legitimacy, security and responsibility – an arms trade treaty will only provide added value if it requires countries to assess exports of arms on the basis of a set of clear and ambitious criteria. One indispensable criterion is the end-user’s respect for human rights and international humanitarian law. Whenever arms transfers violate international obligations or there is a clear risk that arms are used for serious violations of international human rights law or international humanitarian law, these arms transfers must be denied. There are additional important criteria: regional stability and the impact on inter- or intra-state conflicts, the conditions in the recipient country, the impact on sustainable
development and the risk of diversion. If we want to see greater responsibility in the arms trade, these criteria cannot be ignored.

Second, any arms trade treaty must be truly comprehensive. It must cover both all critical goods and the full range of activities at stake. We believe that an Arms Trade Treaty should cover all types of conventional weapons, including notably small arms and light weapons, all types of munitions, including ammunition, and related technologies as well as parts and components especially designed for military purposes. All types of transfers plus brokering should be captured by an Arms Trade Treaty. At the same time, we want national control systems to be established that differentiate between the various types of activities; there is no one-size-fits-all. The national control systems should foresee comprehensive measures to secure reliable knowledge of end-use and end-user in the country of final destination.

Finally, an Arms Trade Treaty should be legally binding. This will ensure the global consistency required to make the Treaty effective. It should be enforced individually by its parties. It goes without saying that States parties to the Treaty maintain their rights to decide on arms transfers. We are convinced that such a Treaty will enjoy broad support and will receive the legitimacy it needs. We also consider that the future Treaty should be open for signature to relevant regional and international organizations in accordance with practice followed for similar international instruments, such as the United Nations Firearms Protocol.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There is an urgent need for action. There is no excuse for failure. Since 2006 the United Nations Member States – with important and decisive support from civil society – have been working on the conceptual and procedural groundwork for this conference. The millions of people suffering from the consequences of unregulated trade in conventional arms place their hopes on us. My delegation is willing to continue to show its full engagement for this process. We should work together to seize the historic opportunity and make this Conference a success!

Thank you for your attention.