Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty

13 February 2012

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Mr Chair

First let me register our strong appreciation of the leadership you have provided this process to date. This has been further demonstrated by the significant progress we have made today. Australia looks forward to working with you this week and again at the Conference in July. We believe your approach has been consultative and fair, and your leadership has been creative and inspirational.

Mr Chair

In this intervention, we would like to address some issues you have suggested we should deal with in the course of the next day or so.

Australia generally supports the use of the UN General Assembly’s rules of procedure during the Conference, adjusted as necessary - acknowledging your powerful argument that we should adhere to established practice where possible. We recognise that the rules of procedure should reflect the objective of a consensus outcome at the Conference – as agreed in our mandate. In our view, the rules of procedure that have been proposed innovatively meet that mandate. But we have listened carefully to the views of CARICOM and Argentina and will give further consideration to these suggestions.

In general, we need our decision making process to be an open and transparent one for States, where consensus is marked by the absence of formal objection. We must ensure the final treaty remains strong, and upholds the security and humanitarian objectives of our mandate. As operative paragraph 5 of resolution 64/48 unambiguously states, our
ambition is “to achieve a strong and robust treaty”. We should not allow the consensus provision to compromise or lower that ambition.

And while I have the floor, let me offer a couple of other general points about our task this week.

Central to our task is to agree on a report for transmission to the negotiation Conference. In our view, the report does not need to be long or overburdened. It should be clear and simple, conveying the essential messages and the right procedural framework necessary for us to transition from our deliberative process to the actual negotiation of an effective Arms Trade Treaty.

The Conference will build on the elements of the Treaty that we have formulated together during the Preparatory Committee. We must ensure that we do not lose the progress that we have already made.

We also want to record our strong support for the conclusions reached today, particularly the proposed structure of the conference and the flexibility for the Conference to decide on elaborating this structure. We fully support the provisional agenda as now considered – including the constructive suggestions and compromises from the floor – we think this now provides the right roadmap for the Diplomatic Conference.

Mr Chair

Conclusion on an effective Arms Trade Treaty will require concerted engagement from all States. We are fully committed to achieving a meaningful treaty and we will engage constructively and assist wherever we can to reach this objective. Australia has been honoured to play an active role on the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee and we intend to continue our contribution with the same commitment.

As a final point, let me record that Australia has supported, and continues to support, the engagement of non-government and international organisations during the meetings of the Preparatory Committee to the extent compatible with achievement of our overall mission. NGO representatives on our own delegation have certainly provided most useful perspective and practicality to our own deliberations. It is clear that experts and advocates from these organisations have much to contribute, including to the Diplomatic Conference itself.

Thank you Mr Chair.