EU opening statement at the Preparatory Committee of the Arms Trade Treaty

By

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- CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY -
Mr Chairman,

1. I am speaking on behalf of the European Union.

2. Mr Chairman, let me express my deepest satisfaction to see you once again at the head of this Preparatory Committee. We have already expressed on many occasions the full confidence and appreciation we have of your leadership and we are ready to continue to offer our full support to your endeavours also during this crucial week of works. Over the previous sessions of the Committee we had unprecedented substantive discussion and we achieved tremendous results in a limited amount of time. We are convinced that this is also due to the methods of work and guidance you have offered to us that allowed each delegation to feel the ownership and inclusiveness of this process where no national views have been neglected. It is based on this experience that we would like to express today the wish of seeing you lead this negotiating process until the end of the UN Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty.

3. The EU considers that at the last session of the Preparatory Committee in July 2011, delegations had the opportunity to complete the substantive discussion on the main aspects of an Arms Trade Treaty, according to the terms defined by the mandate of the PrepCom. At this stage, it seems to us that, as far as issues of substance are concerned, the mandate of the PrepCom has been fulfilled and that formal negotiations of the content of the Treaty should be left for the forum that has been specifically foreseen for this purpose, i.e. the UN Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty.

4. To date, different views on various aspects of the future treaty have been expressed and formulated. We consider that these views are well reflected in the latest version of 14 July 2011 of your Draft Paper. As we stated on the last day of the session of the PrepCom in July 2011, the EU considers that your paper provides a rich synthesis and it can offer a solid basis on which to build during the 2012 Diplomatic Conference. We also recognize that the Draft Paper does not contain the precise language that is needed in a treaty. But, if we well interpreted your proposal when it was first presented in the PrepCom, this was not the aim of
this paper. Last July we already flagged some of the elements on which we thought further improvements were needed and we still hold the same view.

Mr Chairman,

5. The Member States of the European Union consider that this week should rather be devoted to the discussion of procedural issues in preparation of the July 2012 Conference. We look forward to engaging with you and other delegations in discussions on what the best procedural rules for the ATT negotiating conference would be. Our aim remains the successful negotiation of a strong and robust Arms Trade Treaty, that enjoys the support of the international community and that can be signed by as many States as possible. This is one of the most important objectives to keep in mind when considering the rules of procedure of the Conference. We will certainly come back during the week with further views on this, inspired by your proposal and the view of other delegations.

6. We have always considered the ATT process as a UN process and it is only in this forum that we want to see this treaty negotiated. This is why we consider that it is UN practice that should guide us also in the matter of defining the rules of procedure of the negotiating conference.

7. The UN General Assembly resolution 64/48 establishes that the UN Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty "will be undertaken in an open and transparent manner, on the basis of consensus, to achieve a strong and robust treaty". Let me recall here that in UN practice consensus is not meant to mean unanimity but rather a process consisting in arriving at a decision without formal objections and vote. UN practice has also shown that consensus is not generally applied to procedural questions that should continue to be made subject to voting, if necessary.

8. It is our understanding that the reference to the "basis of consensus" implies that consensus is something we should reach for the most important decision to be taken by the Conference, i.e. the adoption of the text of the treaty.
9. Finally, we recognize the role that civil society has been playing in the ATT process. We support the active participation of NGO's representatives in the Conference, while maintaining the possibility of having closed sessions when appropriate. We would also favour expanding the possibility of NGOs to address the ATT Conference to a number of meetings.

Mr Chairman,

10. Let me conclude by wishing you and all colleagues in the room a very successful week of consultations and by reassuring you of the full engagement that will continue to guide the actions of the European Union in this process.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.