Second Review Conference of the Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons
27 August 2012

General debate

Statement by HE Ms Philippa King
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Madam President, Australia joins others in thanking you in your capacity as President and your team for your highly industrious, transparent and consultative approach in preparing for this Second Conference to review progress made in the implementation of the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons.

We gather here today to address what continues to be one of the most serious global security and humanitarian threats. Everyday, more than 1500 people are killed by small arms related violence. The devastation doesn’t stop at the body count. The daily reality for many people in many countries is the fear, suffering and chaos wrought by these arms – leaked out of stockpiles, illegally and irresponsibly bought and sold, smuggled and bartered in black and grey markets around the world.

These weapons also perpetuate economic and social disadvantage and entrench poverty. Oxfam has estimated that the conflicts fuelled by imported weapons cost Africa up to $18 billion a year. Small arms facilitate other threats - crime, gang warfare and terrorism.

As these problems persist, it is undoubtedly clear that the UN Programme of Action is even more relevant today than when it was adopted in 2001. The Programme of Action provides a comprehensive framework of mutually reinforcing norms and actions to prevent and combat the destabilising impact of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

What we need to do at this Conference is collectively make a frank assessment about how we have performed in implementing the Programme of Action, and to renew and enhance our pledge to eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. We must do this
by agreeing on a number of practical measures that will improve our collective efforts in coming years. Australia is committed to working with others here to achieve this outcome.

Madam President

Limited resources and different capacities of States continue to present significant impediments to realising the goals of the Programme of Action. This Review Conference will enable States to review what States have done in promoting international cooperation and assistance to implement the Programme of Action, and to identify areas where we must do better. A number of useful lessons have been learned since 2001 and there are substantial opportunities to achieve gains by expanding and improving the assistance we afford one another. Australia, Germany and Cote d’Ivoire have prepared a working paper to help facilitate an outcome on this critical issue. Our paper identifies some of the practices that contribute to successful implementation of the Programme of Action, including the importance of national ownership, and the need to tie small arms assistance to broader development objectives and frameworks. We propose that States can improve the quantity and quality of international cooperation and assistance over the next six years by ensuring there is better focus on monitoring and evaluation, and through pragmatic mechanisms to match resources to the needs of affected countries.

One such mechanism that we are proposing is the establishment of an improved multi-donor fund, that will increase the flow and flexibility of financial and technical assistance. We acknowledge Caricom’s call this morning for such a trust fund and we ask donors to support and contribute to this fund. At the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) Conference in July, Australia’s Foreign Minister Senator Bob Carr committed $1 million start up funding to this facility, to support developing countries implement the Programme of Action and implement a future Arms Trade Treaty.

Adopting a robust ATT that regulates the trade in all conventional weapons and by extension prevents the illegal and irresponsible trade in small arms and light weapons and their ammunition is a fundamental part of the solution to stopping the devastating impact of these weapons on families and societies. Although no agreement was reached on a Treaty in July, States walked away with a strong draft text, Australia remains determined to work with all States to finalise a strong and effective ATT as soon as possible.

This Review Conference provides an opportunity for States to redouble our efforts to ensure that more information and technical knowhow is shared and more assistance is provided to States most affected by the excessive accumulation and uncontrolled spread of small arms and light weapons.

In recognition of the call for more assistance, Australia’s support for programs to tackle small arms is growing. We are providing financial and technical assistance to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of Congo, Somaliland, Central African Republic, Cote d’Ivoire, and in our own region PNG, Vanuatu and Tuvalu. We congratulate these governments for the results they have achieved and for their unrelenting commitment to reduce the threat small arms and light weapons pose to their people.
Australia is also pleased to again be supporting delegates from affected countries from Africa, Caribbean and the Pacific to participate in this Review Conference, under the UNDP voluntary sponsorship fund. Active participation by the States most affected by the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons is the best way to ensure the outcome of our discussions translate to results on the ground.

Madam President

The factors influencing the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons are often regional in nature, and increasingly require regional solutions. Regional efforts first inspired the need and potential to have a universal Programme of Action to tackle small arms and light weapons. In many cases progress on small arms has been made through legally binding measures at the regional level, some that go beyond the scope of the Programme of Action, reflecting the seriousness of the problem and the determination to beat it.

Regional cooperation has delivered vital progress – and this area also remains ripe for further gains. In recognition of this, Pacific and Caribbean Community (CARICOM) States have together submitted a paper to this Conference on regional cooperation. We encourage others to consider how regional cooperation, networks and organisations can enhance national measures to implement the Programme of Action. We hope that this will stimulate some new thinking on this issue and the Review Conference can agree on some pragmatic ways that States should work regionally, including through strengthened law enforcement cooperation, capacity building and reporting assistance.

Madame President

Australia supports your approach to the Conference outcome document. We must have a document that reaffirms our commitment to the Programme of Action and our determination to improve its implementation. Having a declaration, two implementation plans and a clear schedule for the follow up process will enable the Review Conference to identify our priorities going forward, and how we can achieve them. The implementation plans will provide us with a firm foundation to strengthen the impact of the Programme of Action and International Tracing Instrument over the next six years. It will provide us with pragmatic guidance and will keep us to account. We are honoured to assist you in facilitating further discussions of your draft 2012 declaration. We will be transparent, inclusive and fair in undertaking this role.

Madam President

We look forward to a productive Review Conference – one that takes us forward - under your skilful guidance.