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AT THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE TO REVIEW PROGRESS
MADE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
PROGRAMME OF ACTION TO
PREVENT, COMBAT AND ERADICATE THE ILLICIT TRADE IN
SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS
IN ALL ITS ASPECTS

UNITED NATIONS
NEW YORK
28 AUGUST 2012

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Madam President,

At the outset, my delegation wishes to congratulate you on your election as President of this Second Conference to Review Progress made in the Implementation of the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons. At the same time, we also wish to extend our congratulations to the members of your Bureau on their appointment. My delegation is confident that under your leadership we will be able to reach a successful conclusion to this Review Conference.

My delegation also wishes to fully associate itself with the statements delivered earlier by Indonesia and Nigeria on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the African Group respectively.

Madam President,

We meet at a time when States, relevant NGOs and the international community are too well aware of the fact that we’ve convened here in the shadow of a month-long negotiation session on an Arms Trade Treaty, where the culmination of six years of intense work ended in disappointment. In fact, that experience was merely symptomatic of efforts aimed at reaching consensus on the conventional arms issues at UN level since the adoption of the UNPoA just over eleven years ago.

Such efforts at reaching consensus have proved to be elusive. In fact, having been closely associated with the process that led to the adoption of the UNPoA in 2001, our delegation’s assessment of the current mood in the conventional arms debate is that if the text of the UNPoA was to be reintroduced into the General Assembly today, agreement on its text would in all likelihood not be possible at this juncture. That is the stark reality. At the same time, we share the hope of others that all is not lost on further work on an ATT.

Having said that, however, the process that we have followed thus far under your guidance, Madam President, has been far more conducive to achieving a successful outcome during this Review Conference than has been during our First Review Conference in 2006. You have been conducting our consultations in a very transparent manner and in my delegation’s view we have been able to make great strides in our work to date.

Madam President,

South Africa continues to believe that there are two central tenets to the full implementation of the UNPoA: i.e. firstly, the issue of our national implementation undertakings, as outlined in Section II of the UNPoA, and, secondly; Section III that deals with International cooperation and assistance.

A number of African delegations at the EU sponsored meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, just two weeks ago highlighted a number of implementation challenges that still remain at their respective national levels. Some of the very basic elements of national stockpile management-related measures still need to be implemented. Such a lack of adequate national controls poses a critical risk as a source of legally held State-owned small arms and light weapons being diverted into the illicit trade.
The aspects of what such national stockpile management measures encompass are vast and cover issues from marking and record-keeping, secure storage and arms control transfer structures and systems.

These are areas where South Africa is still not convinced that enough has been done since 2001. We should guard against simply assuming that these basic elements have been implemented by glossing over them in an effort to move on to new issues for inclusion into a perhaps updated version of the UNPoA.

South Africa is of the view that we should balance our enthusiasm and level of ambition with a degree of realism over the next week and a half. It was our assessment at the time in 2006 that it was the level of over-ambition and attempts to rewrite the UNPoA that was probably the single biggest factor that led to the failure of the First Review Conference to agree to an outcome document.

Madam President,

Apart from the first issue of national implementation efforts, the second issue that our delegation is concerned about is that of the full implementation of the third section of the UNPoA; namely that of international cooperation assistance. The implementation of Section II on national implementation, as outlined above, is closely linked to international cooperation and assistance. Such assistance could take many forms and does not exclude South-South cooperation. In fact, this is an important area that my delegation has highlighted on a number of occasions. Such assistance, especially in the field of capacity building in stockpile management and border and customs controls is of real use when resources are scarce, but where practical knowledge and experience in the field exists. This is often of maximum benefit in that States in the same region face similar challenges that require similar and mutual cooperative responses.

Assistance and cooperation as a whole, Madam President, should not be conditional. Of course, every State in a position to assist may request some form of verification or monitoring mechanism from a recipient State, or it may wish recipient States to indicate that their national UNPoA implementation plans are integrated into their overall development plans. However, in such cases these arrangements should be subject to bilateral arrangements and don't warrant further consideration at this Review Conference.

Madam President,

In addition to these points, we remain concerned that the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons are the main instruments that perpetrate crime, whether organized or isolated, sustain conflicts and fuel terrorism. South Africa fully recognizes the debilitating humanitarian effects that these arms have, including human rights abuses, not the least of which are those inflicted by the use of illicit arms against women, children and the elderly. My delegation agrees with calls to further integrate the role of women into efforts to combat the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. Such calls require requisite public awareness-raising efforts at the national levels where they are needed most, not only on integrating the role of women, but on implementing the UNPoA at the respective national levels in its entirety.

In conclusion, Madam President, my delegation fully supports your draft outcome document as the most inclusive and constructive basis for our deliberations during this Review Conference.

I thank you, Madam President.