UK Statement
Sixth Biennial Meeting of States on the UN Programme of Action (UNPoA) to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in all its Aspects
Mr Chair, the United Kingdom remains fully committed to the implementation of the UN Programme of Action to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects (UNPoA). We stand ready to work with partners to ensure that a forward-looking, action-oriented outcome document can be secured.

The UK aligns itself with the statement presented by [...] on behalf of the European Union and its Member States. We would like to make a few additional points in our national capacity.

The effective control of small arms and light weapons is a goal that unites us all because the potential consequences of their misuse are so grave. When States fail to control the supply and sale of these weapons, they not only jeopardise the safety and security of innocent people worldwide - including a disproportionate number of women and children - but also fuel instability and threaten international peace and security.

That is why the UK welcomes the inclusion of small arms and light weapons in the scope of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), acknowledging that efforts to better regulate transfer of conventional arms contribute to the prevention of diversion, un-authorised re-export and illicit trade in SALW. It is therefore right that the Outcome Document of this meeting should also reflect this.
Controlling SALW exports

The UK operates one of the most rigorous and transparent arms export control systems in the world. The core objectives of our licensing system are to promote global security by preventing controlled goods from falling into the wrong hands. All export and trade licence applications are carefully assessed on a case-by-case basis against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria. This assessment process takes into account all relevant factors at the time of the application, including the prevailing circumstances in the recipient country, the nature of the goods, the end-user, and the stated end-use.

The Government follows a clear and well-understood procedure for each application, which is informed by expert advice from a number of Departments. A licence will not be issued if to do so would be inconsistent with any provision of the mandatory Criteria. If there is a clear risk that goods might be used for internal repression or external aggression, the licence is always denied. In addition, the Government can and does suspend applications and licences to countries experiencing a sharp deterioration in security or stability, where there is a clear case to do so or if conditions make it impossible or extremely difficult to apply the Consolidated Criteria. This suspension mechanism was introduced in 2012 and is evidence that our system responds effectively to sudden change.

The UK is committed to a transparent export control system, and the Government publishes export licensing decisions and details of export controls policy in its Annual Report on Strategic Export Controls, as well as contributing to the EU Annual Report.
on Arms Exports. The Government recognises and respects the public interest in export licensing decisions and publishes quarterly statistics of all export and trade licenses issued, refused or revoked. We also remain committed to providing annual returns to the UN Register on Conventional Arms, the Arms Trade Treaty and multilateral agreements through the European Union, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Wassennar Arrangement.

The UK also operates an effective enforcement regime for arms exports, led by Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs (HMRC) working jointly with the Border Force to detect and prevent unlicensed arms exports from or through the UK. Additionally, HMRC works jointly with the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) to engage with legitimate arms exporters and help them comply with the law, whilst also vigorously pursuing those who carelessly or deliberately circumvent the legislation.

Arms Management and Destruction
Small arms and light weapons have been the primary enablers and weapons in all recent armed conflicts and continue to undermine efforts to consolidate peace in countries emerging from conflict. By fuelling the spread of instability and insecurity, they hamper the efforts of States, the UN and other organisations to provide protection, humanitarian aid and development resources around the world.

Yet the threat of small arms and light weapons depends not only on the weapons themselves but on an uninterrupted supply of ammunition. Therefore, controlling the supply of ammunition can have an immediate impact on the intensity of armed
violence. So we welcome specific inclusion of ammunition in the Arms Trade Treaty and look for opportunities to replicate this in other control mechanisms.

The UK is grateful for partners' views on arms management, including the destruction of surplus and seized weapons. Inadequate stockpile management has been highlighted by the Secretary General as an acute problem in many parts of the world. States need to do more to establish appropriate policies for addressing excessive accumulation and diversion from State-controlled stocks and for the disposal of illicit SALW and ammunition. In addition, States need to do more to address challenges posed by reactivation of poorly deactivated or decommissioned weapons.

We strongly support the Secretary General's recommendation that destruction should be the preferred solution for surplus stockpiles of arms and ammunition, and welcome efforts by Member States, the UN and other international and civil society organisations in this regard.

We place great priority on the work of assisting States in the removal or destruction of surplus and seized small arms and light weapons and their ammunition. We do this by collecting and destroying small arms and light weapons during disarmament and reintegration processes, encouraging safe storage and arms management, and encouraging the surrender of surplus small arms and light weapons or illicit weapons held by civilians. This financial year we are committing over £1 million for arms management and destruction projects in priority countries.
As well as assisting affected states and societies in arms management and destruction activity, the UK destroyed over 9,800 of its own surplus small arms and light weapons. We also seized over 400 small arms and light weapons that were moving across the UK border without the required licence or authorisation.

Finally, Mr Chair, the UK looks forward to productive discussions over the next few days, including on how to sustainably develop policy-making and organisational capacity for arms management and destruction at the national level.

Thank you, Mr Chair.