Opening Remarks

by

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I would like to start by expressing my deep appreciation to the Government of Indonesia for hosting this subregional workshop on Transparency in Armaments -- the first of its kind to be
held in South East Asia. It is also the fourth a series of workshops devoted to the two arms transparency instruments of the United Nations -- namely, the UN Register of Conventional Arms and the UN standardized instrument for reporting military expenditures.

I would also like to thank the sponsoring Governments of Canada, Germany, Japan and the Netherlands for their continued support and close cooperation with the Department of Disarmament Affairs in organizing this workshop as well as the previous three workshops in this series. Last year, the Department organized two subregional workshops in West and Southern Africa, in addition to a regional workshop in Lima, Peru, which covered Latin America and the Caribbean. We are now examining the prospects for holding similar workshops in other subregions, as we continue to promote increased use of these instruments -- a task we can only accomplish through promoting a deeper understanding of their purposes and functions throughout the world.

The Register of Conventional Arms and the reporting instrument are not in themselves arms control or arms regulation instruments, although there is good reason to believe that progress towards global transparency -- their common goal -- will lead to restraint in armaments.

These voluntary instruments are intended to help reduce misperception, to prevent miscalculation, and to build confidence and trust among States through greater openness in military matters. Together, they can contribute significantly towards these objectives if the participation by Governments continues to grow, along with the quantity and quality of data they submit.

The primary purpose of these workshops is to achieve a higher level of global participation by discussing with governmental experts the objectives, procedures and parameters of the two transparency instruments. Another important purpose is to obtain valuable feedback and inputs from the regions and subregions, to improve the long-term prospects of these instruments. In particular, such feedback would enrich the work of the Group of Governmental Experts, which will be reviewing the operation and further development of the Register, starting in March this year at UN Headquarters in New York.
We have distributed a set of documents and information sheets, which I hope you will find useful both during the course of this workshop and when you return to your national capitals.

The Register has progressed reasonably well over the last decade. The progress has been particularly encouraging in recent years, as reflected in an impressive 25 percent increase in participation over the last two years – from 99 submissions for calendar year 1999 to 125 for calendar year 2001. Likewise, participation in the military expenditure instrument has also grown remarkably - by about 50 percent in the last two years.

While these are very encouraging trends, sustaining this pattern will require continued attention and effort, marked by closer cooperation between the UN Secretariat, the key sponsors of the instruments, and the national capitals of participating States.

Despite the significant progress made in recent years, these instruments are still a long way from achieving the goal of universal participation. While this may be difficult to achieve in the short term, the achievement of this goal is surely worthy of additional efforts by all Member States.

Some 162 Governments have so far participated in the Register one or more times, while 102 Governments have reported to the military expenditure instrument at least once. This gives us a broad foundation for new progress with these instruments in the years ahead.

In particular, follow up activities will be required in order to build upon the work accomplished through the current series of workshops. I am pleased to note that the sponsors intend to engage in such activities with the cooperation of the Department of Disarmament Affairs.

I am also confident that the review of the Register by governmental experts this year -- the fourth since 1992 -- will further improve the future prospects of the instrument, particularly in terms of strengthening its scope and improving the data submitted by participating Governments. After 10 years, it is important for the Register to demonstrate that it is a dynamic instrument capable of adapting to new requirements and expectations, thereby safeguarding its relevance and significance to the contemporary situation. The interest displayed by Member States in observing the tenth anniversary of the Register last October at UN Headquarters in New York augurs well
for its future.

The instrument for reporting military expenditures, which has been in operation for much longer than the Register, has finally begun to move forward at an encouraging pace. It is vitally important to sustain this momentum, a task that will require dedicated effort and persistence in the face of such obstacles as apathy, ignorance, and the distraction of competing priorities.

Despite severe resource constraints, the Department of Disarmament Affairs is devoting considerable effort to facilitating the progress of both of these instruments, through workshops and other activities including publications to raise the profile of these instruments. We will continue to work closely with participating Governments. We would also welcome establishing institutional links with regional or subregional bodies, as we have accomplished with the Organization of American States and look forward to accomplishing in Southern Africa. Meanwhile, we have helped to raise the profile of arms transparency on the agenda of the Secretary-General’s Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa with the support of all its ten member-states.

It would help our work enormously if Governments would provide the Department of Disarmament Affairs with their national points of contact, as this will enable us to establish direct lines of communication between UN Headquarters and national capitals. The absence of such information hinders the use and further development of these transparency instruments. In my letter to all UN Member States last October, I urged them to send us information regarding their national points of contact. I therefore respectfully encourage those of you who have not transmitted such information, or have not updated that information, to do so as soon as possible.

Improvements in arms transparency must -- and I believe will -- eventually become an embedded feature of international relations. The two UN arms transparency instruments could play a significant role in making this possible if the positive trends we see today in most areas of the world can be sustained and reinforced. This will require continued support from regional and subregional groupings such as ASEAN, as well as sustained support and assistance from the key sponsors of the two instruments, with an active role by the UN Secretariat as a facilitator.
The Department of Disarmament Affairs therefore looks forward to continuing its close cooperation with the sponsors and to strengthening working level contacts between the Secretariat and the national capitals.

Finally, may I conclude by extending my thanks once again to the Government of Indonesia for hosting this subregional workshop, as well as to the sponsoring Governments of Canada, Germany, Japan and the Netherlands for making this possible through their contributions.

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