

First Substantive Session of the Open-ended Working Group towards an Arms
Trade Treaty

Statement

By

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Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I welcome the opportunity to address this open-ended working group at the outset of its deliberations. It is good to see Ambassador Moritán back as chairman of this Group. Having served last year as Chair of the Group of Governmental Experts on the issue we will discuss this week, he brings a lot of knowledge and experience to our work, and the strong leadership which a potentially challenging process like this needs.

Let me turn to the issue before us. Member States' armed forces, police, and security forces legitimately employ a range of weaponry for effectively executing their task as central providers of security. Arms may therefore be transferred with the intention to help ensure stability and security and to protect civilians.

However, too often the ready availability of arms and ammunition has led to tragic results, including repression and terror among civilian populations. Sometimes weaponry is transferred to governments whose security forces have been known to gravely and systematically misuse their prerogatives. And all too often, non-state actors are able to acquire such weapons for criminal or terrorist uses.

Irresponsible and poorly regulated transfers of conventional arms can destabilize regional security, disrupt entire national economies, enable the violation of Security Council arms embargoes, and contribute to human rights abuses.

That is why the call for a regulation of the conventional arms trade is becoming louder. From leaders of States to individuals and groups in civil society, the world has witnessed an outpouring of support for the establishment of an Arms Trade Treaty.

One of the consequences from the international financial crisis is what one might call, the return of governance. In a globalized world, it is absolutely essential to maintain and reinvigorate effective forms of national and international regulation and supervision, so that stability and security can prevail – both nationally and internationally. In my opinion, that is just as relevant for the arms trade as it is for financial markets.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Though the issue of international conventional arms transfers has long been on the agenda of the United Nations, the General Assembly is now affording it more serious attention since the adoption of resolution 61/89 in December 2006.

Firstly, an unprecedented number of Member States submitted their views to the 2007 report of the Secretary-General on the issue. Secondly, the Group of Governmental Experts I mentioned earlier convened last year under Ambassador Moritán's guidance to examine the feasibility, scope and draft parameters for a comprehensive, legally binding instrument establishing

common international standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional arms, and produced its consensus report. And thirdly, this open-ended working group was established and will now convene its first session.

While this is a most welcome development, the complexity of the issues to be tackled by this open-ended working group is high.

As indicated in the report of the GGE, unpacking the myriad considerations related to conventional arms transfers will require not only concerted international action, but also the political will to rise above individual national interests. This would require all of us to think and work towards truly collective security, which the founding fathers of this organization had hoped would be the guiding principle of the United Nations. Guided by this vision, Member States would strive to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war; reaffirm their faith in human rights, the dignity and worth of every human being, the equal rights of men and women of nations large and small; and the promotion of social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.

You will recall that last November, the Security Council held its first open debate ever on “maintenance of international peace and security: strengthening collective security through general regulation and reduction of armaments.” At the conclusion of that debate, the Security Council noted the importance of collective security and its impact on disarmament and development, and stressed its concern over increasing global military expenditures. It also stressed the importance of appropriate levels of military expenditure, in order to achieve undiminished security for all *at the lowest appropriate level of armaments*. In this regard, the Council urged all States to devote as many resources as possible to economic and social development, in particular in the fight against poverty and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

The Council also underlined the importance of promoting norms-setting in accordance with international law, as part of the efforts to strengthen non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control measures. In addition, it stressed the importance of compliance with and the reinforcing of existing agreements, conventions, and treaties that relate to these matters and international peace and security.

Let the Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations, the Presidential Statement adopted at the conclusion of the Security Council open debate referred to above, as well as the numerous resolutions, guidelines and decisions adopted by the General Assembly on the issue of conventional arms transfers provide guidance to your work.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

May we all muster the necessary political will that will allow us to build a safer world and a strengthened collective security for all. We all share a heavy responsibility to do our best in helping to re-build the shattered lives of those that continue to be victims of various vicious cycles of armed conflicts and armed violence.

The Office for Disarmament Affairs stands ready to provide whatever substantive assistance the Group may deem necessary. I thank you.