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**STATEMENT
BY**

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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**

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Mr President,

I wish to join those who spoke before me in congratulating you on your election as President of this Review Conference. We are under no illusions about the challenges that we will face during these two weeks. However, we have full confidence in your leadership that, with the assistance of your bureau, will lead us to a successful outcome of this Conference at the end of next week.

In August 1994, the South African Cabinet took a decision to ensure that South Africa would establish itself as a responsible manufacturer, possessor and trader of conventional arms. This decision, amongst others, sought to avoid a repeat of the painful past that South Africans commemorated earlier this month, on 16 June, which was the thirtieth anniversary of the Soweto uprising, a historic milestone in our country's journey to democracy. On that day in 1976, a peaceful student protest over the right to use first or home language as a medium of education in schools turned bloody and ended in tragedy at the hands of the apartheid Government forces. It was part of a painful chapter in our history, which ended when the first democratically elected Government was sworn in during May 1994.

In order to ensure that the use of such excessive force by Government forces would never again be repeated, the South African Government has made the protection of its people one of its main priorities. It has also been striving for peace and security on the African continent and has supported similar efforts throughout the world. In this context, we believe that the United Nations Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons (UNPoA) continues to present a sound, practical and implementable framework for national, regional and global action against the illicit small arms and light weapons trade.

Mr President,

Our review of the implementation of this instrument five years after its adoption must necessarily take stock of what our achievements to date have been and also identify the areas where some States are still lagging behind others in their implementation efforts. It is this latter aspect that should be our primary concern.

In identifying these weaknesses my delegation wishes to emphasise two elements of the UNPoA that we believe should continue to receive the focus of our attention. The first of these is the section dealing with national implementation measures in section II. The second is that of implementing our undertakings that we made in 2001 in section III relating to international co-operation and assistance. Many developing countries, especially those in Africa, may find it difficult to fulfil their national obligations without the assistance of the international community. Both of these issues are also central themes of the African Common Position for this Review Conference, as adopted by the Executive Council of the African Union in January of this year.

Mr President,

The substantive elements of the UNPoA that my delegation believes are at the core of preventing weapons that are in legal possession from entering the illicit trade, relate to broader stockpile management matters, including; safekeeping and security of government stockpiles, marking, record-keeping, as well as the identification and destruction of surplus and obsolete stocks. It is also important that States fulfil their undertakings relating to the enactment of national arms transfer control legislation and the establishment or maintenance of national arms transfer control systems.

Care should be taken not to highlight one or two elements of the arms transfer process at the expense of the others. An effective national system starts with the registration of manufacturers, dealers and brokers; the application of national transfer control criteria when applications are assessed; strict requirements for authenticated end-user certificates; to the point of the physical transfer of the arms through the border control points. Essentially this process needs to be regarded as a chain of these successive, but interrelated stages.

In line with paragraph 11 of section II of the UNPoA, the National Conventional Arms Control Act, promulgated in 2003, established South Africa's national arms control system. The Committee of Cabinet Ministers that was created in terms of this Act oversees all policy matters related to arms control, transfers and considers all applications on a case by case basis. Amongst others, the Act regulates also brokering services and requires the provision of authenticated end-user certificates.

Mr President,

Apart from diversion and corruption, theft from Government stocks is another major source of illicit small arms and light weapons. The identification of surplus, obsolete and redundant small arms and light weapons for destruction purposes remains a priority for South Africa. In this context, the South African Police Service has destroyed well over 100 000 small arms and light weapons, while the South African National Defence Force has destroyed close to 300 000 such arms over the past number of years. Both of these identification and destruction exercises, which were funded by the generous assistance of Norway, continue to this day. South Africa has also assisted Lesotho and the Democratic Republic of Congo with their surplus arms destruction exercises. Planning is currently underway to build a plant in South Africa for the destruction of surplus and obsolete ammunition.

South Africa remains ready to participate in regional efforts aimed the implementation of the UNPoA.

Mr President,

We all know of the tragic incidents involving small arms across the world that are regularly beamed across the television networks, restricted not only to countries of the South, but ranging also to places such as Columbine and Beslan. For this reason, South Africa believes in effective national legislation on civilian ownership and that civilians should not be able to possess those weapons that are designed for military purposes. As we are here to review the implementation of the UNPoA, we cannot review what has been done in the field of curbing the transfers of small arms and light weapons to armed non-state actors. However, our delegation is of the view that our determination to prevent such transfers needs to be affirmed.

Similarly, ammunition is not addressed in the UNPoA. However, South Africa counts itself amongst those States that believe it to be an integral part of the problem of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. Its unchecked availability has the potential to fuel conflict and crime. South Africa would, therefore, actively support any process within the United Nations that would seek to address the issue in a comprehensive manner.

As we look towards the next Review Conference, we also need to reflect on our accomplishments relating to the two substantive issues earmarked for follow-up work as agreed to in the 2001 Conference. In doing so, we need to face up to the fact that we have perhaps not achieved what we had set out to do. The feasibility study on an international instrument to trace illicit small arms and light weapons was indeed done, but the resultant instrument falls short of what a vast number of States had hoped to achieve. On the other issue, that of further exploring the issue of illicit brokering, the discussion in five years has not yet moved beyond the stage of informal consultations. We are, however, encouraged that a Group of Governmental Experts has been mandated to consider the issue later this year.

This does, however, raise a note of concern in that an overly ambitious future agenda may hamper current implementation efforts and for some, amount to shifting the goal posts in the huge amount of undertakings that they still need to implement. Having said that, my delegation will fully support any forward-looking, but implementable follow-up.

In conclusion, Mr President, our collective efforts to fully implement the UNPoA should be aimed at combating conflict and crime, and reducing the number of civilian casualties amongst innocent victims and bystanders caught up in these situations. The South African Government has placed peace and security, as well as the social and economic wellbeing of its people at the top of its agenda. This includes actions to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. It is this political resolve with which States should take on and implement their commitments made in 2001. South Africa will continue to operationalise its national implementation undertakings in the UNPoA and fully support implementation efforts at the regional and global levels.

I thank you, Mr President.