STATEMENT
BY
SOUTH AFRICA

DELIVERED
BY

AMBASSADOR CLAUDINA MTSHALI

ON THE
THEMATIC DEBATE:
CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS

UNITED NATIONS
21 October 2004

Check against delivery
Chairperson,

South Africa is committed to a policy of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control, which covers all weapons of mass destruction and extends to concerns relating to the proliferation of conventional weapons.

The current stalemate on issues related to in particular nuclear weapons is in stark contrast to the progress made on issues related to conventional arms. Indeed, substantive meetings relating to small arms, anti-personnel mines and other conventional weapons deemed to have indiscriminate effects or causing superfluous injury fill our disarmament calendar.

Chairperson,

The proliferation and excessive accumulation of small arms and light weapons continues to pose a threat to the security and stability of many nations, inhibits their development and undermines good governance. The human suffering caused by these weapons needs to be addressed urgently, in a practical and action oriented manner.

South Africa therefore attaches great importance 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. The numerous small arms initiatives being undertaken on the national, regional and global level is a testimony to the commitment by Member States and the non-governmental community to implement and facilitate the implementation of the 2001 Programme of Action (PoA).

In approximately 18 months we would be reviewing this Programme of Action and more importantly we will decide how to further proceed with actions to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects. The vehicle to further strengthen our collective action on small arms is the preparatory process for this Review Conference and the Conference itself. An important meeting leading to this Review Conference is the second biennial meeting on small arms scheduled for June 2005.

We should not only have already started with our substantive preparations for these meetings, but we should also, at an early stage, focus on procedural issues such as reaching an understanding on who will chair the biennial meeting and the Review Conference itself. Early preparations will greatly facilitate the successful outcome we are all working for.

Chairperson,

South Africa continues to believe that for a tracing instrument on illicit small arms and light weapons to be effective and practical, it is important that the scope of such an instrument should, therefore, be as comprehensive in nature as possible and that it should not be restricted to State-owned small arms and light weapons only, but also to civilian-owned weapons of this nature. We also continue to believe that the Working Group should examine how it could include in such an instrument the issue of marking, record-keeping
and tracing of ammunition and explosives, as it is widely accepted that these form part of the problems associated with small arms and light weapons.

Chairperson,

Much progress has been made in eradicating anti-personnel mines. The Mine Ban Treaty has established itself as the norm in banning anti-personnel mines and the clearance of mined areas with more than 140 States that are now adhering to this Treaty. We will be gathering in Nairobi, Kenya, later this year, to consolidate the achievements on banning this deadly weapon, and planning the priorities for the next five years at the First Review Conference of the Mine Ban Treaty.

South Africa believes that the Review Conference should evaluate our achievements and recognise the challenges during the next five years. Critical to these challenges being the need for us to intensify our efforts to mobilise resources to clear mined areas and assist those who have become victims of this lethal weapon.

South Africa therefore supports the adoption of an action plan that is realistic and achievable, which would guide the implementation of the MBT until the Second Review Conference. In this regard, the Common African Position on Anti-Personnel Landmines, adopted here in New York at the African Union Ministerial Meeting last month, sends a powerful message on Africa’s implementation priorities in the field of mine action and the banning of anti-personnel mines.

Chairperson,

South Africa welcomes the constructive discussions that were held in the context of the experts meetings of the States Parties to the Certain Conventional Weapons Convention (CCW). South Africa believes that progress has been made on especially the issue of compliance and at the Meeting of States Parties, to be held next month, a decision would need to be taken on how to take this issue forward.

South Africa also welcomes the adoption of the additional protocol to the CCW on explosive remnants of war and is in the process of preparing its instrument of consent to be bound by this protocol, to enable it to enter into force at an early date.

In conclusion, Chairperson,

An agenda that would rapidly lead us to a world free of anti-personnel mines is in place and progress has been achieved in dealing with the issue of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects. The political will and the determination to address the issue of conventional weapons in a constructive manner should therefore be sustained.

Chairperson, I thank you.