Statement by Mr. Mason Smit
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First Committee Thematic Debate on Conventional Weapons

Introduction

Mr Chairman,

I wish to thank the Chairman of the Group of Government Experts, H. E Ambassador Roberto Garcia Moritan, for his comments and views yesterday on the work of the Group of Experts and for the report contained in document A/62/278 and the addendums therein.

In making this short statement, my delegation wishes to reiterate our overall commitment to disarmament and non-proliferation whilst at the same time acknowledging the inherent right of states to acquire conventional weapons for legitimate self defense as enshrined in Article 51 of the UN Charter; and law enforcement needs, including peacekeeping, in accordance with international law and standards.

Arms Trade Treaty

We agree with the comments by Ambassador Moritan on the Arms Trade Treaty. There is no doubt that there is a need for an universally accepted Arms Trade Treaty that will better regulate the trade in conventional arms. In terms of establishing common international standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional arms. In this regard, we welcome the establishment of an Open Ended Working Group which we hope will commence discussions soon, towards a truly global ATT—we hope that the Open Ended Working Group will be inclusive and will consult widely with member states, especially with those Missions based here in New York. We agree that is only through International Cooperation and Common Language that we can have a truly global ATT.

UN Register of Conventional Arms & Reporting Military Expenditure

Fiji wishes to express its deep concern regarding the negative impact of conventional weapons. My delegation finds itself in a unique position, as a non-manufacturer and non-exporter of conventional weapons to urge member states for increased transparency and confidence building measures regarding conventional weapons. Indeed, a core element in preventing conflict and securing peace and stability is through transparent reporting by member states on their conventional weapons. This is realized through national reports to the UN Register of Conventional Arms and the UN Instrument for Reporting Military Expenditure.

Regrettably only 88 national reports on conventional arms were received by the UN Register of Conventional Arms this past year: Fiji being one of only 36 states that provided “nil” reports. Furthermore, Mr. Chairmar, only 74 national reports on military expenditure were received. These are fairly low “compliance” figures that do not augur well for confidence-building measures. We again urge member states to provide national reports to both the UN Register of Conventional Arms and the UN Instrument for Reporting Military Expenditure.
Small Arms and Light Weapons

Mr Chairman,

My delegation is of the view that the problem of illicit proliferation and use of small arms and light weapons is one of supply and demand. The international community has often sought solutions to the question pertaining to the demand for small arms and light weapons, yet much still needs to be done to address the question pertaining to the supply, indeed the manufacturer of small arms and light weapons—which are often surplus to the genuine defence needs of member states and which are being produced more for proliferation and profit. More needs to be done by the international community to address the manufacture and supply of these small arms and light weapons if we are to stop the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

The recent UN conference, held this past July, here in New York, to Review the Progress made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action (PoA) to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in SALW in All its Aspects, could not agree on a final outcome document. This is of concern to my delegation.

In addition, Mr. Chairman, and as part of the “in all its aspects” of the PoA to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in SALW, there is a need for a follow-up mechanism to fully address, the illegal acquisition and use of conventional weapons by non-state actors.

Surplus Ammunition

The fight against the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons is just one part of the equation. Readily available ammunition, often sourced from surplus stocks, is the other part of the equation and is most often the catalyst that causes so much mayhem and destruction. Here too, lies the problem of supply and demand—demand supplied by illegal trafficking, which in turn prolongs conflict. The international community must consider further steps to enhance cooperation in order to ensure that surplus stockpile of ammunition are either destroyed or better secured.

Anti-Personnel Mines

It is a sad fact that anti-personnel mines continue to be used in conflicts around the world today. Despite this setback, some progress has recently been made—to date a total of 156 States, have now either ratified or acceded to the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. In this regard, we welcome our Pacific neighbor Palau, who last year became a State Party to the Convention. Notwithstanding this, there is still an urgent need to promote the universality of the Convention. Fiji does not produce, use, stockpile or transfer anti-personnel mines. We therefore encourage States that have not signed or ratified the Convention to do so without delay.

Cluster Munitions

Mr. Chairman,

Fiji also does not manufacture, use, stockpile or transfer conventional weapons that are deemed to be excessively injurious or to have indiscriminative effects. Furthermore, we wish to voice our strong support for the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and its protocols.

In keeping with this support, we participated actively in the Diplomatic Conference on Cluster Munitions in Dublin, Ireland in May this year which concluded negotiations on a treaty instrument on cluster munitions.

We wish to reiterate our support for achieving the noble humanitarian goal of prohibiting cluster munitions which cause unacceptable harm to civilians and therefore encourage all like-minded states to sign the Treaty in Oslo, Norway on 03 December 2008.

I thank you.