Statement by
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First Committee
Thematic debate on conventional weapons

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman,

The international community has for some time been seized of the need to address the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. But it has not allocated enough attention to the threats posed by the uncontrolled and irresponsible proliferation of conventional weapons, other military equipment and know-how. This is especially true when it comes to terrorists.

we have seen that irresponsible transfers of conventional arms strengthen extremist groups, and turn terrorist cells into a dominating force using arms against civilians, as a method of gaining political advantage.

It is Israel’s long standing position that any initiative dealing with conventional arms has to maintain the balance between legitimate security needs of states and the need to prevent unnecessary human suffering.

Mr. Chairman

The Middle East is particularly vulnerable to the impact of illicit arms transfers to terrorists. Arms continue to flow to terrorists groups, notwithstanding the resolve of the international community to embark on a process to regulate arms trade. The conflict that erupted in the summer of 2006 has shown that MANPADS, UAVs, missiles of various types and ranges, as well as very short range rockets, are not outside the reach of terrorists. The Hezbollah, which is supported first and foremost by Iran, has continued to arm itself since 2006. The Hamas terror organization is following closely in Hezbollah's footsteps.

In the past year, the Hezbollah has entrenched itself further in the Lebanese political sphere. It has increased the breadth and sophistication of its arsenals. The transfers of arms from Iran and Syria to Hezbollah have continued unabated, in contravention of UNSCR 1701. The smuggling of arms plays into the hands of those who wish to ignite conflict in the region, and has been facilitated by states turning a blind eye and sometimes even encouraging this phenomenon.

Mr. Chairman,

The international community must address as a priority the prevention of arms transfers to terrorists. We must create a clear and comprehensive norm banning such transfers and take concrete steps to halt all such transfers. Some states continue to transfer or condone the transfer of arms to terrorist groups, while at the same time condemning terrorist. There can be no justification for this. Thus curbing illicit arms proliferation must begin with a strong national commitment and determination.

In June 2007, the delegation of Israel to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva...
presented a working paper to promote further action on this issue. This working paper set out, and analyzed, existing documents, instruments and resolutions on the prevention of arms transfers to terrorists. The paper demonstrated the need for immediate, comprehensive and systematic action. This will require pragmatism - long enduring differences over issues such as definitions must be put aside.

We must identify practical steps to move this issue forward. This could, for example, include identification of national programs to increase awareness and build capacity, followed by enhanced cooperation and coordination between states - on multilateral, regional and bilateral levels.

Israel is looking forward to continued debate on how best to address this issue with all delegations in this room.

Mr. Chairman,

The irresponsible arms trade must be addressed first and foremost by stringent national measures. Enacting national controls of this type should take precedence over global ventures. Israel, for its part, has long maintained a vigorous national export control system. Recently, Israel has reformed its export control system - including legislation and operational framework - to meet highest recognized international standards, in particular those set by the International Suppliers Regimes.

On the 31st of December 2007, a new Export Control Law entered into force. This law regulates export control over the Munitions List of the Wassenaar Suppliers regime, the MTCR and beyond. In doing so Israel also gives high priority to the implementation of the UNSC arms embargo resolutions. It augments the Export Control Order of January 2007 that regulates control over dual use items and technologies based on the dual-use list of the Wassenaar arrangement.

Mr. Chairman,

Small arms and light weapons are the most accessible weapons of choice for terrorists and organized crime. Disturbing statistics point out that growing number of people that are killed directly or indirectly due to armed violence. More than two thirds of about 750,000 deaths per year occur outside of war zones. The UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons of July 2001 is one of the most important instruments addressing this scourge.

The third BMS held in July this year was a success. Israel welcomes the substantive outcome document, which sets up an incremental process based on international cooperation and assistance. Israel regrets that no consensus could be reached on the outcome due to difficulties mounted cynically by Iran on the last day of the meeting. Iran is notoriously known as the most heavily involved in the transfer of arms to terrorists in our region.

I take this opportunity to commend the BMS chair, Ambassador Dalius Cekuolis of Lithuania for guiding us to a restored confidence in the POA process. Israel will
continue to contribute to the rejuvenation of the POA.

Mr. Chairman,

Much focus in this First Committee session has been given to the establishment of global regime for the responsible transfer of arms - through an Arms Trade Treaty. The Group of Governmental Experts on an ATT has concluded its work by consensus and my government is carefully studying the final report. I would note, however, that the report called for further consideration on this issue within the UN on a step-by-step basis. This is clear evidence of the complexity of the issue.

Israel still remains to be convinced that an international Arms Trade Treaty could indeed provide commonly agreed standards, which would enhance the overall level of control exercised by States. In particular, we continue to be concerned that an Arms Trade Treaty would be ineffective in ceasing uncontrolled flows of weapons and military equipment into untrustworthy hands, in particular terrorists.

In deliberations on a future ATT, the international community should ensure that such an instrument does not have an effect on legitimate trade in arms. Moreover, it must limit of the possibility that such an instrument could be abused for political reasons to limit legitimate transfer to states for self-defense.

Mr. Chairman

This year has seen significant developments with respect to the creation of a norm on the use of cluster munitions. The Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) remains the relevant and appropriate forum for addressing such weapons. As an important instrument of international humanitarian law it continues to strike a balance between military and humanitarian considerations. Since its inception it has encompassed major users and producers of conventional weapons, including cluster munitions. In the past year the CCW conducted serious, in-depth negotiations in order to conclude a new protocol on cluster munitions.

Further negotiations are scheduled for the month of November. With continued seriousness on the part of all member states a meaningful protocol on cluster munitions can be achieved by the end of the year. Israel trusts and hopes that those CCW member states, which were also involved in other negotiations on the issue, will continue to exert their best efforts in order to achieve an agreement in the CCW.

Finally, Mr. Chairman

We believe that the time has come to look afresh at the traditional paradigm for addressing the threats caused by conventional arms proliferation. The international community must find new and innovative ways to address emerging threats and in particular the one posed by terrorists.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.