STATEMENT
BY
SOUTH AFRICA

ON THE
THEMATIC DEBATE: CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS
FIRST COMMITTEE

DELIVERED BY
AMBASSADOR LESLIE GUMBI

UNITED NATIONS
NEW YORK
20 OCTOBER 2008

Check against delivery
Mr. Chairperson,

South Africa has noted with concern that conventional weapons have most often been used in inter-state, as well as intra-state warfare, and have been responsible for the majority of casualties throughout the world. In South Africa's statement during the Committee's General Debate, my delegation already touched upon a few aspects of the conventional weapons debate. My intervention today will therefore be confined to highlighting specific elements within the conventional weapons theme.

Mr. Chairperson,

The *United Nations Programme of Action on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (UNPoA)* remains the central global instrument to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in these weapons. The full implementation of the Programme of Action in all its aspects should therefore remain central to all our national, sub-regional, regional and international efforts to address this scourge.

South Africa welcomed the outcome of the Third Biennial Meeting of States during July 2008, which restarted the formal international consideration of the implementation of the UNPoA. Through the adoption of a substantive report at the end of BMS3, the UN small arms process is now widely considered to be back on track.

South Africa believes that international co-operation and assistance remains an essential aspect of the full implementation of the Programme of Action. Such international cooperation and assistance is, in fact, an overarching theme underpinning all the undertakings that States made when they adopted the Programme of Action. As such, it is not limited to illicit trade in SALW in the strictest sense, but also extends to efforts to *inter alia* address illicit brokering, trace illicit SALW, and stockpile management, where a whole range of measures are required to prevent theft and diversion of State-owned SALW.

In addition, Chairperson, international co-operation and assistance efforts should also be built on the foundation of capacity building, because without the necessary skills transfers, the sustainability of implementation efforts would be compromised. Whilst national reporting on implementation efforts could facilitate the receipt of international cooperation and assistance, my delegation holds the view that the focus should remain on enabling States to make progress on their implementation efforts, rather than developing formal requirements.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Anti-Personnel Mine-Ban Convention remains the most comprehensive international instrument for ridding the world of the scourge of anti-personnel mines. At the Ninth Meeting of States Parties to the Mine-Ban Convention, that will be held in Geneva from 24 to 28 November 2008, the most important aspect will be the consideration of requests for extensions to clearance deadlines.
States Parties therefore face the important task of deciding on requests for the extension of deadlines for completing the destruction of emplaced anti-personnel mines in accordance with Article 5 of the Convention. The consideration of these requests will be particularly challenging, as no precedent exists for taking such decisions. In addition, our consideration will require a thorough analysis of the situation in each requesting State.

In the above regard, I wish to point out that South Africa believes that the clearance of all mined areas in accordance with the Mine-Ban Treaty is part of the Convention's overall comprehensive approach to ending the suffering and casualties caused by anti-personnel mines. We are therefore understandably disappointed to have learnt for how long many mine-affected States Parties have left their national assessments and related clearance implementation plans. In this regard, we would call upon those States that have submitted extension requests to redouble their mine clearance efforts.

Mr. Chairperson,

South Africa welcomed the opportunity in May of this year to participate in the Dublin Diplomatic Conference to negotiate a legally binding international instrument to prohibit the use and stockpiling of cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians. My delegation will also continue to actively participate in the deliberations on cluster munitions within the context of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), and specifically in the next Experts meeting that will take place in Geneva from 3 to 7 November 2008, as well as the next annual meeting of the CCW States Parties.

Mr. Chairperson,

Conventional weapons often appear to attract less international attention than Weapons of Mass Destruction. However, conventional weapons proliferation remains a very real problem, particularly in those areas of the world where small arms are not only cheap, but also easily accessible and where their proliferation continues to fuel violence and conflict. It is therefore important to continue all endeavours aimed at intensifying arms control efforts, as well as increasing transparency and confidence building in arms trade transactions.

In terms of its National Conventional Arms Control Act, South Africa will continue to ensure the implementation of a legitimate, effective and transparent arms control process and to foster national and international confidence in its control procedures. As such, we seek to contribute to regional and international security and stability, by promoting transparency and greater responsibility in the transfers of conventional arms.

I thank you, Mr. Chairperson.