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Thematic discussion on conventional weapons

Statement by Ms Valerie Grey
Deputy Permanent Representative of Australia to the Conference on Disarmament

(Check against delivery)

Mr Chairman

The past year has seen important developments in the world of conventional arms control.

Australia is proud to have played a role in developing, and being amongst the first to sign, the first new arms control treaty in several years - the new Convention on Cluster Munitions.

The consensus adoption of the report of the Open-Ended Working Group Towards an Arms Trade Treaty was a welcome achievement as are global and regional efforts to refocus international attention on small arms and light weapons.

These developments show us that it is indeed possible for the international community to make progress on difficult security issues so long as enough parties are committed to a common goal and determined to see it achieved.
Cooperation on Prohibiting Cluster Munitions

Mr Chairman

In December 2008 Australia’s Foreign Minister signed the Convention on Cluster Munitions, making Australia amongst the first group of States to sign the Convention. In a testament to the international support for ending the scourge of these weapons, over ninety States signed the Convention on its first day.

This Convention is a significant humanitarian achievement.

It prohibits cluster munitions that randomly scatter tens or hundreds of sub-munitions that have no self-destruction mechanism and self-deactivation feature. These sub-munitions remain in place to pose a long-term threat to innocent civilians for years to come.

The Convention’s provisions on victim assistance now set the standard for other conventional arms control regimes. They will help ensure a better life for the survivors of cluster munitions and their families. The Convention’s clearance and assistance provisions will help communities free their lands of contamination and the debilitating effects of these weapons.

All States involved in this process are rightly proud of their achievement. We must now turn our common determination towards encouraging rapid entry into force, universalisation and full implementation of the Convention. Australia is working assiduously toward its own ratification of the Convention.

The first Meeting of States Parties, likely to be held in the second half of 2010, will be an opportunity for States to lay the foundation for strong cooperation in fulfilling the Convention’s objectives. We warmly welcome the Lao Government’s generous offer to host the first Meeting. We will work with the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and other States to make the Meeting a great success.

We urge all delegations to join us and help ensure swift and broad operationalisation of this valuable addition to our humanitarian and arms control architecture.

While Australia and many others are prepared to accept the prohibitions of the Convention, some major producers and users seem likely to remain outside its framework. We continue to support efforts in the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons to achieve meaningful prohibitions on the use of cluster munitions by those who have not signed or ratified the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

…and Anti-Personnel Landmines

Mr Chairman

Australia looks forward to a productive and successful Second Review Conference of the Mine Ban Convention on Anti-personnel Mines, to be held in Colombia in late November 2009.
The Cartagena Summit on a Mine-free World will be an opportunity for States Parties, at a high-level, to take stock of the substantial achievements made and consider the best means to tackle the future challenges posed by the continuing threat of anti-personnel mines. We welcome the Summit’s focus on victim assistance and trust that we will hear the voices of the survivors and work together to improve their lives.

Some of the most pressing challenges facing the Convention include the failure by some States to comply with their clearance and stockpile destruction obligations, the need to provide more effective assistance to victims and survivors, and promoting universalisation of the Convention.

We can, however, be proud of our achievements in the last decade. Vast tracts of land have been cleared and released for use, over 40 million mines have been destroyed and the number of new victims continues to fall. States enjoy a high degree of cooperation on mine action. But our work is nowhere near complete.

We will join others to ensure the Cartagena Action Plan and Declaration is ambitious, results-oriented and forward-looking. Australia will continue to work with other States and civil society to promote the full realisation of the Convention’s important goals.

More Work Needed on Mine Action

Mr Chairman

Cluster munitions, landmines and other explosive remnants of war are a tragic legacy of conflict. They continue to constrain development in many of the poorest countries and have devastating socio-economic impacts. Affected communities face a long-term burden of caring for survivors and their families and must endure the loss of productive workers and the contamination of otherwise productive land.

Australia continues to be strongly committed to international instruments that include victim assistance obligations, including the Mine Ban Convention, Protocol V of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and the Cluster Munitions Convention.

Australia is a leading contributor to mine action around the world.

Through its aid programme, Australia has provided substantial resources to projects engaged in clearance of landmines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war, and the release of land. We are also significantly involved in providing risk education and reduction projects and survivor assistance in developing countries. In the past year, Australia has supported projects in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Iraq, Laos, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Small Arms and Light Weapons Still a Major Challenge

Mr Chairman

The fourth Biennial Meeting of States on the UN’s Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its
Aspects in June 2010 will be a key opportunity to bolster our collective will to fulfil the Programme's broad aims.

BMS4 should build upon the success of previous meetings and provide the framework for fruitful exchanges at the experts meeting on small arms in 2011 and the Review Conference in 2012.

In partnership with the United Nations, Australia hosted a regional meeting on the implementation of the Programme of Action in Sydney in June 2009 in which Pacific Island States and Timor-Leste attended. Participants discussed in detail the priority that small arms have in the Pacific due to multiple factors, including the social status of gun use, the wide availability of weapons, the negative impact on communities and the lack of support mechanisms. The meeting developed further the UN’s Regional Implementation Guidelines on the Programme of Action.

At the Pacific Islands Forum meeting in August 2009, chaired by Australia, leaders expressed their concern at the availability throughout the Pacific of small arms and light weapons, which more often than not are used in criminal activities and in furthering political power.

Small arms and light weapons fuel and exacerbate violence and conflict. They have significant costs and impacts, including financial and loss of life. They can be easily produced, concealed and transferred and can threaten regional peace and security, as well as development and human rights.

Australia remains strongly committed to international cooperation to ensure the objectives of the Programme of Action are fully implemented.

And we congratulate South Africa, Japan and Colombia and on their forward looking resolution on small arms and light weapons. The resolution concretely builds on the BMS3 outcome document and lays the foundation for meaningful progress at BMS4 in 2010.

Negotiations Needed on an Arms Trade Treaty

Mr Chairman

The irresponsible, illicit transfer of conventional arms and their components is a serious problem that the international community needs to address urgently.

Australia strongly supports international action to achieve an Arms Trade Treaty.

A legally binding, multilateral treaty would set common criteria and standards for the transfer of conventional weapons, and prevent abuse of international human rights and humanitarian standards, transfers to terrorists and the destabilising accumulation of arms.
A well-crafted Arms Trade Treaty would also provide greater assurance for legitimate trade.

Australia was pleased with the outcome of the Open-Ended Working Group towards an Arms Trade Treaty this year. A key acknowledgement was made that the unregulated transfer and diversion to the illicit market of conventional weapons is a problem that must be addressed.

As a co-author we support the draft resolution on the Arms Trade Treaty mandating the remaining meeting times in 2010 and 2011 as preparatory committees ahead of a diplomatic conference to elaborate the Treaty in 2012.

Step-by-step, the international community is moving towards achieving this timely and much-needed strengthening of the international arms control and security architecture.

Mr Chairman

The progress and vision we have seen in some areas is needed across the conventional arms control agenda.

Australia has seen in its own region the humanitarian catastrophe of conventional arms proliferation. These weapons can hamper development and seriously threaten security and stability.

Mr Chairman, I assure you of Australia's continued commitment to addressing the threat of proliferation of conventional weapons.

Thank you.