DRAFT STATEMENT
BY

SOUTH AFRICA
DURING THE THEMATIC DEBATE
ON CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS

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Chairperson

Since the last First Committee Session, we note with satisfaction that progress has been made in the field of conventional arms. In some areas, the implementation of existing instruments have been strengthened, while work continues on the elaboration of new international norms and instruments regulating the use, production and stockpiling of such weapons. However, much remains to be done.

Chairperson,

Small arms and light weapons continue to be responsible for a large number of casualties every day. Most of the weapons responsible for these fatalities and injuries are illegal, which illustrates the magnitude of the challenge we face to curb the unnecessary deaths of innocent people. It is our strong belief that we need to put peace, security, criminality and humanitarian concerns ahead of commercial interests if we are to successfully address the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. For this reason, international cooperation, particularly at regional and sub-regional levels, is key to eliminating the illicit transfer of small arms and light weapons.

South Africa continues to attach great importance to the implementation of the UN Programme of Action (POA) to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects. In this connection, we welcome the successful conclusion of the Fourth Biennial Meeting of States (BMS4) which took place from 14-18 June 2010 here in New York. The Chair’s summary provides us with action oriented measures in support of the full implementation of the POA. These include, among others the establishment, where appropriate, of sub-regional or regional mechanisms with a view to preventing, combating and eradicating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, including trans-border customs cooperation and networks for information-sharing among law enforcement, border and customs control agencies, and international cooperation. It is now incumbent upon us to implement these measures in our respective national capacities.

Colombia, Japan and South Africa – under the Co-ordinatorship of Colombia – will again this year submit the omnibus resolution to address the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. The resolution provides an update on the implementation of POA related issues, especially the outcome of BMS4 and provides an operational framework for the future implementation of the Programme of Action. My delegation hopes that with its non-controversial nature, the General Assembly will be able to adopt the text by consensus.

Chairperson,

South Africa will continue to work hand in hand with other UN Member States in the process spelled out in GA resolution 64/48 entitled “The Arms Trade Treaty” mandating a Preparatory Committee process to negotiate a legally binding instrument that will establish the highest possible common standards for the regulation of the arms transfers. The first Preparatory Committee session held in July this year, saw a robust debate develop that allowed for an encouraging exchange of ideas. South Africa wishes to express its satisfaction with the progress that was made towards establishing a common understanding around some of the key issues that the Treaty will address. Member States should continue their vigorous engagement on the many remaining questions around, inter alia, the scope, parameters and implementation of the Treaty. Our work in this regard is of prime
importance if we are serious about improving the quality of life of all our citizens through the regulation of arms trade and transfers.

Chairperson,

South Africa attaches great importance to the implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. In this regard, we welcome the successful hosting of the Second Review Conference that took in Cartagena, Colombia in November/December 2009. South Africa welcomes the adoption of the action plan that recommitts States Parties to the implementation of the Convention’s provisions in relation to victim assistance, mine clearance, stockpile destruction and co-operation and assistance.

While we welcome the progress that has been made to date, it is clear that much more needs to be done to achieve our goal of a world free of anti-personnel mines. Many mine victims still do not have access to medical care, education, physical rehabilitation, social services, vocational training and subsequent employment. We are also concerned that a number of States Parties could not meet their clearance deadlines and consequently requested extensions. The slow pace of clearance hinders reconstruction and development efforts in communities that desperately need land for agriculture and other important uses. We believe that early planning and implementation and the allocation of adequate resources will go a long way in addressing these problems.

Chairperson,

South Africa shares the concern about the humanitarian impact of cluster munitions. As a Signatory to the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM), South Africa is fully committed to the ban on the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of cluster munitions.

We therefore welcome the entry into force of the CCM on 1 August 2010. My country has been playing an active role in the preparations for the first Meeting of States Parties scheduled to take place in Vientiane, Lao Peoples Democratic Republic from 8 to 12 November 2010. The CCM represents a landmark humanitarian disarmament instrument that sets new standards in our collective commitment to the principles of international humanitarian law. As a former producer of cluster munitions that have an area wide effect, South Africa believes that these weapons have not only become obsolete as weapons of modern warfare, but that their recent use in conflicts have shown them to cause unacceptable harm to civilians, even long after the cessation of active hostilities. South Africa has a relatively small stockpile of obsolete cluster munitions that have already been earmarked for destruction.

We welcome the significant support that the CCM has received to date and the fact that it has been endorsed by most African States. In this regard, we recall the "Kampala Action Plan", adopted by forty-two African States in 2008 where an undertaking was made to ratify this convention as soon as possible. In this context, I can report that South Africa remains committed to its ratification of the CCM. Africa has been ravaged by wars, often fuelled by weapons produced elsewhere in the world. We will therefore continue to work towards the establishment of a truly cluster munitions free continent.

Chairperson,
As a State Party to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (CCW), South Africa remains committed to the full implementation and universal application of the provisions of the framework Convention and its five Protocols.

In addition, South Africa has also been actively participating in the CCW meetings of the Group of Governmental Experts that has been negotiating a possible protocol on cluster munitions. While we appreciate the efforts that have been made for many years to deal with cluster munitions in the CCW context, we are concerned about the lack of progress in the CCW towards the finalisation of a credible instrument that will address the humanitarian impact of cluster munitions. We note that the current draft text under consideration continues to contain a number of elements that contradict the principles of international humanitarian law. In addition, the transition periods provided for in the draft text remain a serious concern for my delegation. In our view, this draft provision only serves to legitimize the continued use of cluster munitions that are indiscriminate and does not serve our goal of protecting civilians during and after armed conflict.

My country will continue to engage in good faith in the CCW process, however, there is a need for us to take stock of the progress that has been made thus far and to assess whether the current process is able to produce agreement on a protocol that will adequately address the humanitarian impact of cluster munitions. In the meantime, we call on all States that have not yet done so to accede to the Convention on Cluster Munitions as soon as possible.

In conclusion Chairperson, I wish to assure you of South Africa's full co-operation and support as we work towards a successful conclusion of this First Committee Session that will guide our activities during the coming year.

I thank you.