Statement by H.E. Archbishop Francis Chullikatt
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Mr Chairman,

Peace must be built through law and law can only be realized if reason prevails in every individual issue. “Reasoned dialogue” is based on the recognition that in order to build lasting peace, the force of law must always prevail over the law of force!

On this matter, the Holy See’s message has always been loud and clear. Indeed, the Holy See is convinced of the need to build the foundations of peace by recognizing the value of dialogue and by strengthening friendly relations. This, moreover, is the message proposed by the Interreligious Day of Assisi 2011, through which Pope Benedict XVI, in concert with a broad coalition of religious leaders, wishes to emphasize the idea that religions give rise not to conflict but to peace-building among peoples and that they are capable of making an important contribution to the building of an integral humanism that gives pride of place to the transcendent dignity of the human person.

In this context, peace is also the fruit of justice, solidarity and development. There is an intimate connection between development and disarmament: within the framework of a society built on law, disarmament generates development and integral human development has profound and beneficial repercussions on the building of peace and resolution of security issues.

From this perspective, the Holy See firmly maintains its critique of the arms race and intends to develop its analysis in the sphere of international relations, according to the criterion that law ought always prevail over violence. Unfortunately, world military spending continues to increase; according to the most recent statistics — those relating to 2010 — it was around 1,630,000 million US dollars, representing a steady increase relative to the previous year (1,569,000 million USD), and a significant rise since the year 2000 (1,044,000 million USD). This state of affairs clearly contradicts the Millennium Development Goals and, as we have repeated on many occasions, it is in marked contrast with the United Nations Charter, which commits States to maintain “international peace and security with the least diversion for armaments of the world’s human and economic resources.”

The international community is therefore faced with the urgent need to put the brakes on this lamentable arms race and to promote a significant cut in military spending. True,
such a cut can only be achieved in a climate of reduced fear and restored confidence. A cut in military spending could give greater credibility to the prohibition of force in international relations, making it possible to guarantee greater respect for international law and to root peace in justice, both in international relations and within each nation; moreover, it makes it possible to guarantee security in better conditions and to allocate for peaceful purposes the enormous sums of money saved.

It is therefore both necessary and urgent that the international community focus its attention on these questions and that, in consequence, it act in accordance with the important and laudable objectives it has set for itself.

Mr Chairman,

These reflections assume even greater importance if one notes that in 2010, as also in 2011, there seems to have been little progress in the area of disarmament, arms control and reduction or redirection of military spending in favour of the peaceful development of peoples. Emblematic of this worrying situation is the fact that, for too many years, the Conference on Disarmament seems to have been undergoing a crisis that hinders its activity and effectiveness.

The situation, however, is not altogether without a few glimmers of hope. One positive factor, recorded also in 2010, was a real strategic reduction in nuclear arms. Yet, in order to be fully effective, it needs to be supported by a clear and positive political perspective. Recent disasters, especially the dramatic episode of Fukushima in Japan, oblige us to conduct a serious and wide-ranging reflection on the use of nuclear energy in both civilian and military spheres. In this regard, work needs to recommence on the Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty, while the non-entering into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty needs to be remedied: the obligation to refrain from conducting tests, as well as nuclear disarmament itself, are the necessary condition for persuading States that do not yet have nuclear weapons to respect the rules of non-proliferation.

There are also some positive aspects in the area of conventional weapons. I refer in particular to the Cluster Munitions Convention, firmly supported by the Holy See, as well as the idea, included in the Convention, of the primary importance of assistance to victims. In this context, recognition should be given to the valuable work carried out alongside States by some NGOs. Such cooperation should be valued even more and may be regarded as an encouraging sign of the vitality of civil society’s commitment to the values of justice and peace.

Mr Chairman,

There is one further observation that the Holy See wishes to make in connection with the Arms Trade Treaty process, for which 2012 will be an important year, as the Conference scheduled to take place then should lead to the drafting of a text. In this context, the issue of small arms and light weapons should not be regarded like any other kind of merchandise that is offered for sale in global, regional or national markets. Their
production, trade and possession have ethical and social implications. They need to be regulated in accordance with specific principles of a moral and legal nature. Every effort is required to prevent the proliferation of all types of weapons which encourage local wars and urban violence and kill too many people in the world every day. Hence the urgency for the adoption of a legal instrument, which the Holy See fully supports, with legally binding measures on trade control for conventional weapons and munitions on the global, regional and national levels.

The Holy See has often recognized the great importance of the current ATT process as it addresses in particular the grave human cost resulting from the illicit trade in arms. Non-regulated and non-transparent arms trading and the absence of effective monitoring systems for arms trading at the international level cause severe humanitarian consequences, slow down integral human development, undermine the rule of law, increase conflicts and instability around the globe, endanger peace-building processes in various countries and spawn a culture of violence and impunity. Here we should always bear in mind the grave repercussions of illicit trade in arms on peace, development, human rights and the humanitarian situation, especially the serious impact it leaves on women and children. These issues can be effectively solved only through the common sharing of responsibilities by all members of the international community.

The outcome of the current ATT process will test the political will of States to assume their moral and legal responsibility in order to strengthen further the international regime on the existing unregulated arms trade. Focusing on the enormous number of those affected and those suffering from the scourge of the illicit spread of arms and munitions should challenge the international community to achieve an effective and enforceable Arms Trade Treaty. The principal objective of the Treaty should be not merely regulating the trade in conventional weapons or curbing the black market in the same, but also and especially protecting human life and building a world more respectful of human dignity.

The Holy See is convinced that an Arms Trade Treaty can make an important contribution to the promotion of a truly global culture of peace through the responsible cooperation of States, in partnership with the arms industry and in solidarity with civil society. In this perspective, the current efforts to adopt an Arms Trade Treaty could indeed become an auspicious sign of a much-needed political will of nations and governments to ensure greater peace, justice, stability and prosperity in the world.