THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND

STATEMENT ON CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS

by Ms Eleonora Saggese
to the
71st UNGA First Committee

New York, 20th October 2016

Please check against delivery
Mr Chairman / Madam Chair,

At the outset allow me to align my comments with the statement delivered by the European Union; I would now like to add some remarks in a national capacity.

Mr Chairman / Madam Chair,

The United Kingdom remains committed to playing a leading role in international efforts on conventional arms control across the full range of issues and in support of the numerous instruments and arrangements designed to deliver greater global security. It is in our collective interest that these instruments function properly with the necessary financial support and so we encourage all participating States to the many Conventional weapons conventions to pay their contributions at the earliest opportunity as the UK has done.

First and foremost, the United Kingdom is pleased to be part of the development and operation of the Arms Trade Treaty. The priority now is to work together to address the Treaty’s objectives and priorities – in particular understanding and tackling the challenges of effective implementation and universalisation.

We thank Finland for offering to chair the third Conference of States Parties and offer Ambassador Korhonen our full support.

Mr Chairman / Madam Chair,

The UK believes universalisation must remain a priority until the Treaty is truly global. Greater participation will increase the Treaty’s influence, strength and reputation, allowing it to achieve its principal aims of ensuring greater consistency and transparency in the responsible arms trade and eradicating the illicit arms trade. The United Kingdom encourages all States which have not yet done so to make ratification or accession a national priority..

It goes without saying that the Treaty cannot make an impact unless and until it is effectively and widely implemented the establishment of the Voluntary Trust Fund to assist States Parties in implementing the Treaty obligations is therefore a welcome development. The UK will continue to offer technical expertise and financial assistance, where possible, to States looking to implement the Treaty and develop
their export control systems. Over the past year, we have funded nearly £200,000- worth of projects in support of ATT implementation, with projects focused specifically on ratification, accession, and effective implementation.

If we are to build robust safeguards against the illicit flow of arms to terrorists and criminals, who are set on using them to destroy lives, we must maintain momentum in the the Arms Trade Treaty debate. Therefore, we welcome the participation of non State Parties at the CSPs as a signal of their interest and potential involvement in this important discussion. We also welcome the continued engagement by regional organisations, civil society groups, industry and academia, and commend them on the valuable contributions they make through their respective networks and specialisations which, in turn, enable national authorities to meet their security and defence objectives. In addition, we continue to support and promote the equal participation of women in the field of disarmament and arms control, which is crucial to achieve peace and security.

Mr Chairman / Madam Chair,

Please let me now turn to the control of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition.

When States fail to control the supply and sale of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition, they not only jeopardise the safety and security of innocent people worldwide - including a disproportionate number of women and children - but also fuel instability, threaten international peace and security, and exacerbate criminal activity such as poaching and the illegal trade in wildlife. That is why the UK welcomed the inclusion of small arms and light weapons and ammunition in the scope of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), acknowledging that efforts to better regulate legitimate transfers also contribute to the prevention of diversion, unauthorised re-export and illicit trade and supported the adoption of Goal 16.4 which aims at reducing the illicit arms flows in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The United Kingdom is fully committed to implementation of the UN Programme of Action on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, the International Tracing
Instrument and the Firearms Protocol, which remain vital tools in our efforts to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. We were delighted to see wide attendance at the sixth Biennial Meeting of States in June, and commend Amb. Courtenay Rattray of Jamaica for his able stewardship of the meeting, delivering consensus agreement of the Outcome Document.

In addition, the UK continues to provide technical and financial support to States looking to improve their controls against diversion and illicit proliferation. This year we have committed over £1.6 million for weapons and ammunition management and counter proliferation projects.

We support the Declaration prepared by France on illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and look forward to working with Member States in preparation for the Third Review Conference of the UNPoA in 2018.

Mr Chairman /Madam Chair,

In the year of its 25th anniversary, the UN Register continues to be a great transparency and confidence-building measure in the field of the conventional arms trade and we encourage all States to use this valuable instrument. The UK welcomes the recent report by the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE).

Mr Chairman / Madam Chair,

The United Kingdom remains committed to the humanitarian goals of the Convention on Cluster Munitions. We are mindful of the suffering and casualties caused by cluster munitions both at the time of their use, and sometimes for decades thereafter. We are deeply concerned by the reports of cluster munitions use over the past year and call on the actors involved to cease using these weapons. We also call on any states not already party to the Convention to accede to it without delay.

The United Kingdom played an active role in its First Review Conference in Dubrovnik in 2015, where an ambitious action plan was agreed for the coming five years. The Plan rightly addresses every area of the Convention’s work, and provides useful suggestions to assist States Parties in their implementation of the Convention. The United Kingdom also supported the Political Declaration agreed at the 6th
Meeting of States Parties this year under the skilful leadership of Ambassador van der Kwast of the Netherlands which condemned the use of Cluster Munitions by any actor in conformity with Article 21 and sets out the aim of achieving the Convention’s goals by 2030.

The United Kingdom took an active part in the Intersessional meetings of the Anti Personnel Mine Ban Convention in May this year and looks forward to the Conference of States Parties in Santiago in November.

The United Kingdom announced on 14 September the commitment of a further £20m to continue the removal of anti-personnel mines from the Falkland Islands. A significant part of the new project will consist of a technical survey which aims to provide a more accurate picture of the clearance challenge that remains. We look forward to providing more information on this next phase of clearance work at the Meeting of States Parties, and will keep the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention updated on progress throughout.

The United Kingdom continues to support the fundamental humanitarian goal of the Ottawa Convention to end the suffering and casualties caused by anti-personnel mines. For over 20 years, the United Kingdom has supported some of the worst-affected countries around the world to clear landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) after conflict. In 2015 alone, the UK’s mine action work in developing countries resulted in the removal of over 22,000 landmines and ERW; and released over 37 million square metres of land which resulted in people having better access to basic services and increased economic opportunities, as well as enjoying improved safety. The UK's projects reached over 115,000 additional people through mine risk education activities. The UK also worked in Mozambique, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Iraq and Ukraine to strengthen the ability of national authorities to manage their own landmine and ERW programmes.

Just as its aid focuses on repairing the legacy of past conflicts, the United Kingdom is ready and willing to discuss potential future challenges. For that reason the United Kingdom took part in the productive informal meeting of experts on lethal autonomous weapons systems in April this year at the the UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). We thank Germany, and Ambassador Biontino in
particular, for once again leading discussions; and support the recommendations to the Review Conference. We also thank the ICRC for hosting an experts meeting in March this year, which allowed states to explore further the challenges of increasing autonomy.

Despite informal discussions and research to date, it is clear that further work needs to be done in this area and we believe this should occur within the CCW due to its wealth of technical, military and diplomatic expertise.

As Chair of Main Committee 1 at the CCW Review Conference and the Chair designate for the CCW meetings next year, the UK, will do its utmost to support Ambassador Janjua to ensure a successful and forward leaning outcome at the CCW Review Conference in December.

Mr Chairman / Madam Chair,

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate our encouragement to all States here to make ratification of, or accession to the Arms Trade Treaty a matter of priority to that together we can create common standards in the international arms trade and stem illicit flows. An effective Treaty that is fit for purpose has the potential to save hundred of thousands of lives, improve the livelihoods of millions and complement global efforts to curb the illicit trade in wildlife.