Statement under Thematic Discussion on “Conventional Weapons” in the First Committee of the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly on Wednesday, 18 October 2017

Mr. Chairman,

Bangladesh aligns itself with the Statement delivered by Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

In pursuance of our commitment to general and complete disarmament, Bangladesh recognizes the threats posed by the use or threat of use and proliferation of lethal conventional weapons to international peace and security. We find it logical to address these threats also in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Mr. Chairman,

Bangladesh appreciates the outcome of the Fifth Review Conference of the CCW held in Geneva last year. We welcome the decision to establish of an open-ended Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) related to the emerging technologies in the area of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) in the context of the objectives and purpose of CCW. We look forward to substantive outcomes from the GGE’s deliberations.

Mr. Chairman,

As a State Party of the Ottawa Convention, Bangladesh participated in the 15th Meeting of States Parties of the Convention held in Chile last year. In our statement under the General Debate, we expressed our grave concern over the reported laying of anti-personnel mines inside Myanmar’ Rakhine State along our border, which the Myanmar delegation denied in its Right of Reply.

We take this opportunity to share some pertinent observations from the OHCHR Rapid Response Mission Team’s Report based on its visit to Cox’s Bazar in Bangladesh from 13-24 September 2017: “The Team received credible information that an estimated 11 Rohingya victims had suffered severe injuries including missing limbs following mine incidents. The landmines defused have been identified as anti-personnel mines.

On the basis of the information received, the Team believes that the mines were deliberately planted by the Myanmar security forces after 23 August 2017 along the border in an attempt to prevent the Rohingya refugees from returning to Myanmar. Information received by the Team referred to the use of landmines and to incidents of people stepping on mines whilst fleeing, or attempting to return to Myanmar to check on other missing family members from 25 August onwards. They were either instantly killed or suffered serious injuries.”
We would once again underscore the need for proper and independent investigations into these serious allegations, for urgently clearing any anti-personnel mines laid along our border, for ensuring appropriate support for the victims and their families, and for holding those responsible accountable.

We remain preoccupied with this concern since, contrary to Myanmar official narrative, the influx of Rohingya continues unabated on a daily basis. Only yesterday, 15,000 more entered, reportedly from further inside Rakhine State, and many more are waiting across the border.

Bangladesh still awaits responses or reactions to the proposals put forward from our side, during the last high-level bilateral meeting held on 2 October 2017 in Dhaka, on facilitating the safe, secure, voluntary and sustainable return of all forcibly displaced people in and from Rakhine State.

Mr. Chairman,

As a signatory to the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), Bangladesh believes that the Treaty provisions would help put an end to the illegitimate use of and illegal trade in conventional weapons that continue to cause untold human suffering around the world.

Bangladesh aligns with the position that States have the sovereign right to acquire, manufacture, export, import and retain conventional arms and their components for security requirements and self-defence. We also emphasize that no unilateral coercive measure be imposed on the transfer of such arms.

However, the international community has a legal, moral and humanitarian obligation to ascertain that arms transferred to any Member State is not used for gross and systematic violation of international human rights and humanitarian law, including indiscriminate attack against civilian objects. In the words of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Myanmar security forces' operations in Rakhine State since 25 August 2017 can be termed as a “text book example of ethnic cleansing” which he said “appears to be a cynical ploy to forcibly transfer large numbers of people without possibility of return.” We wish to remind concerned members of the international community about their obligations under such telling circumstances, and take note of the symbolic measures announced by some Member States to limit their engagement with the Myanmar security forces.

Mr. Chairman,

The normative and deliberative work done in the General Assembly faces its real test on the ground. In order to be credible to those suffering, our lofty pronouncements here should match our actions in terms of concrete deliverables.

I thank you.