STATEMENT BY
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On the occasion of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly, First Committee,
Thematic Debate on Conventional Weapons

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The Netherlands aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union and would like to make some remarks in its national capacity.

Chairperson,

Disarmament and arms control are not a mere paper exercise. These efforts save lives. They do so, amongst others, by anchoring the use of conventional arms firmly within International Humanitarian Law; through allowing communities to return to their homes by clearing areas of unexploded remnants; and through ensuring that the global arms trade is conducted in a regulated and transparent manner.

The diversity of these dynamics shows us that disarmament and arms control work across multiple sectors, and is not a matter of weapons alone.

The Netherlands is therefore pleased to see stronger linkages between conventional disarmament efforts and development agendas, including within the Secretary General’s Agenda for Disarmament.

A strong example in this regard has been set by the Third Review Conference of the UN Programme of Action on SALW, which has produced an outcome document that acknowledges the integrated nature of the subject matter at hand, by referring to the contribution it makes to the achievement of the SDGs.

Throughout the review conference consensus has been achieved on many important issues, including the need to adopt measures to prevent the illegal transfer of small arms and light weapons to non-state armed actors such as criminal groups and terrorists. We also welcome the recognition of the differentiated impacts that small arms and light weapons have on women, men, girls and boys and we affirm the need to collect data disaggregated by gender to enhance our understanding of the gendered impact of arms use.

The Netherlands had hoped to make progress regarding the inclusion of ammunition within the scope of the Programme of Action and we are disappointed that we did not succeed in doing so in the framework of the Review Conference. However, we welcome the process as established by the UN General Assembly Resolution 72/55 and look forward to continue the discussions.

Chairperson,

Aside from a development agenda, conventional disarmament is also a humanitarian effort. We are reminded of this by the continued use of indiscriminate weapons and the growing number of civilians that fall victim to them, in contexts of both conflict and peacetime.

The threat of Improvised Explosive Devises (IEDs) is of growing concern to the Netherlands, as the use by terrorists continues to bring harm to civilians, as well as to armed forces, including our own forces deployed on missions abroad. We therefore stress the importance of strict measures – both national and global – to prevent the supply of weapons and explosive precursors to terrorists, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2370.

Further, we are concerned by the increased use of anti-personnel mines and mines of an improvised nature in urban areas. Through our humanitarian mine action program, the NL aims to alleviate the suffering caused by these devices and increase the awareness of the risks associated with them among those affected. In our mine action programs, we reaffirm the importance of the humanitarian principles. To safely perform their activities, it is necessary for demining organizations to carry out their activities in a safe, impartial, and independent way.

The Netherlands strongly opposes the continued use of cluster munitions. Let me reiterate that we strongly condemn any use of cluster munitions by any actor. We are committed to making the use of this indiscriminate weapon a phenomenon of the past and will contribute to this effort as significant donor as well as through our position as co-coordinator for cooperation and assistance.
The growing use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA) is very worrisome. In the view of my country, it is irrefutable that any conventional weapons use – including EWIPA – remains firmly anchored within International Humanitarian Law. Compliance with its principles is of the utmost importance.

Chairperson,

The rapid technological advance and increased availability and use of UAVs over the past decade has triggered debate on the regulatory framework to control these systems, their export and use alike. Within the Netherlands the policy debate is lively and particularly focusing on armed UAVs and how to prevent criminal and terrorist actors from acquiring and using these weapon systems. In our view, any use of armed UAVs needs to be firmly anchored within international law. In this context, the expanding use of armed UAVs requires additional international understandings, which should stem from a thorough and inclusive discussion on both possible future risks, as well as positive social-civil uses of such technologies. While the Netherlands remains strongly committed to the existing export control regimes such as the Arms Trade Treaty, the MTCR and the Wassenaar Arrangement, we will continue to actively contribute to the development of the (draft) International Standards on the Export and Subsequent Use of armed UAV’s.

We welcome the progress made in the Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems. It provides a good basis for further structured discussions on this multifaceted and complex topic. Increased autonomy in weapons systems could lead to humanitarian benefits, but there are also risks. One thing is certain, there is no simple solution to address those risks. Therefore the Netherlands remains committed to further increase our shared understanding in order to address those risks and will, as before, actively participate in the discussions.

We look forward to continue these and other discussions during the meeting of high contracting parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons this November. In order to do so, however, we must ensure that the Convention is financially sustainable and properly equipped to facilitate its implementation. We urge all States to meet their financial obligations on time and in full. We encourage additional efforts towards strengthening the contribution process. Also, we need to work on a sustainable model for secretarial support of the CCW and we call upon UNODA to assist with finding possible solutions to this end. Sustainability of the solution is key for the Netherlands.

Chairperson,

The Netherlands is committed to ensuring that the global arms trade is conducted in a regulated and transparent manner.

Since its entry into force the Arms Trade Treaty has set a norm against irresponsible transfers of arms. The Netherlands believes that for the coming years the focus remains on the effective implementation and universalization of the Treaty. As a member of the Management Committee the Netherlands remains fully committed to these goals as well as organizational challenges, such as addressing financial liquidity and unpaid contributions and reporting obligations.

The Netherlands contributes to assistance and outreach, via the EU and nationally, to the Voluntary Trust Fund, to the Control Arm’s ATT monitor project and to the Sponsorship Program once successfully transferred to the ATT secretariat.

The Netherlands would like to stress the importance of transparency and reporting. We congratulate Switzerland on their leadership position in the Trade Transparency Barometer of the Small Arms Survey and the Netherlands is proud to have been awarded a solid second place and to be rewarded with the first place on the aspect of comprehensiveness of reporting. We will continue to do our utmost in this regard, and accordingly we particularly underline the continued relevance of the UN Arms register. We strongly encourage States to keep using this valuable instrument in particular, and to fulfill their reporting obligations in general.

Chairperson,
Let me reiterate that the Netherlands attaches great importance to the universalization of all conventions mentioned above as well as to full compliance with their provisions. We will continue to do our part, together with our partners across the sector who work with us towards these shared goals.

Thank you