STATEMENT BY

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CHEMICAL WEAPONS

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FIRST COMMITTEE
THEMATIC DEBATE ON CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS

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Mr. Chairman,

In our debates we are very much focusing on weapons of mass destruction, for very well-known reasons. And this is the right approach. Nevertheless, at the same time, every year, hundreds of thousands persons, soldiers and civilians, men, women and children lose their lives due to the use of conventional weapons.

Within the last decades the international community has succeeded in working out an immense number of regulations pertaining to conventional weapons. These regulations are also impressive in their substantial content. In addition, we have our internal, national rules and legislations on use and trade of conventional weapons. Let me underline that Poland’s regulations on transfer of weapons are strict, complete and thoroughly followed.

Therefore, it seems justified to pose the question what prevents us from making real progress in cutting number of victims caused by use of conventional weapons – small arms and light weapons in particular? There are several phenomena which deserve our attention in this context.

In last decades we observe decrease of number of “traditional” wars which are replaced by armed conflicts of a different nature – purely domestic conflicts, domestic conflicts with international engagement, conflicts between states and non-state armed groups and also hybrid wars. What is the common denominator of these conflicts? Prevailing number of civilian victims. As we are not able to prevent conflicts, we need to do our utmost to protect innocent civilians. This is the first
humanitarian responsibility of politicians and military commanders in-
chief.

Another interesting trend is a steady increase of volume and value of
international trade of weapons. According to the Arms Transfers
Database of SIPRI, since 2002 we observe steady increase of volume and
value of international transfer of major weapons which in the last two
years has reached the level of late eighties and beginning of nineties of
the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. This is a clear result of the deteriorating security
environment and challenges which we facing nowadays.

\textit{Mr. Chairman,}

Let us be frank and realistic, international transfer of weapons is a fully
legitimate activity. It needs, however, meeting certain standards. One of
them is transparency in armaments as a key confidence-building
measure. Implementation by the states of their export control
regulations matters a lot in this activity. \textit{International Tracing Instrument}
(ITI), requiring States to ensure that weapons are properly marked and
records kept, is important instrument in preventing diversion.

What should be our concern is a fact that the number of states reporting
their trade of weapons to \textit{the United Nations Register of Conventional
Arms} (UNROCA) is lowering recently. However, it is worth noting that the
vast majority of state-parties to \textit{the Arms Trade Treaty} are fulfilling their
obligations.

Although the use of legitimate weapons should be perceived in the
context of security threats and military needs of states, whenever we
speak about use of conventional weapons we need to stress the
importance of compliance with the core principles of the International Humanitarian Law – distinction, proportionality and precaution. This is important in the context of another alarming aspect of contemporary armed conflicts which is the increasing number of fighting in population centers. In such circumstances, explosive weapons are very likely to have indiscriminate effects, which results in killing and injuring civilians.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, we call for more intensive diplomatic efforts to curb number of ongoing and protracted conflicts. We all know how effective could be traditional diplomacy while driven by common interest and mutual respect. To this end we need all truly engage in seeking peaceful solutions for existing conflicts.

I thank you for your attention.