Statement of the Netherlands
delivered by
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Thematic Debate on Conventional Weapons

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In addition to the EU statement, the Netherlands would like to make remarks in its national capacity.

Chairperson,

The Netherlands regards this thematic debate as testament to our joint responsibility for conventional arms control and disarmament. We would like to use our time here to elaborate what that responsibility entails in our view.

A responsible policy should in the first place be responsive. It is in the word: responsibility - the ability to respond.

A responsive policy should adapt to new technological advances. To that end, we have been actively involved in the update of the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) related to improvised explosive devices (IEDs) to ensure that these standards are equipped to deal with new developments.

We will also continue to actively contribute to the development of International Standards on the Export and Subsequent Use of armed Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) in response to the rapid technological developments and the increased availability and use of UAVs.

While recognizing the many potential benefits of the increased autonomy of weapons systems, we cannot turn a blind eye to the potential risks. We will continue to insist that humans exercise meaningful control and remain responsible at all times. We welcome the principles agreed by the GGE LAWS in August and look forward to continuing our work in this regard, with a focus on the application of existing international law.

Responsive also means that we respond to humanitarian concerns stemming from the indiscriminate use of conventional weapons, such as the use of explosive devices like anti-personnel mines and the indiscriminate use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas (EWIPA). We support the efforts to find the right collective response to address the humanitarian concerns, which first and foremost is full compliance with existing international law. In that light, we support the joint statement on EWIPA, coordinated by Ireland.

Responsive further means that we strongly condemn any use of cluster munitions and AP-mines by any actor. We are committed to making the use of these indiscriminate weapons a phenomenon of the past and alleviate suffering caused by them. Therefore, the Netherlands has adopted legislation that prohibits direct investments by Dutch financial entities in companies that are involved in the production, sale or distribution of cluster munitions and its crucial components. We also contribute to mine action worldwide as a major donor with a view to a world free of AP-mines and cluster munitions. We look forward to the Oslo Review Conference later this year.

Responsive finally means that we cannot stand by when conflicts escalate and parties – however just their cause – employ methods that breach international law. A responsible arms control policy should respond by refraining from providing arms in such circumstances. Also, it means combatting the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, and supporting research on diversion in for example North-Africa and the Sahel with a view to improving our policies.

Chairperson,

Secondly, responsibility involves accountability.

Accountability implies being part of a community to which you are accountable. We therefore regard the further universalization of arms control and disarmament frameworks as a key driver of progress in this field. The Netherlands is a member of all major conventional arms control and disarmament frameworks. We stand ready to share our experience to help others join and implement these frameworks. The Netherlands further contributes to technical assistance, via the EU and nationally, through the ATT Voluntary Trust Fund, to the ISUs of the CCM and APMBC and to the Sponsorship Programmes of the APMBC and ATT.
We should ensure the community is inclusive and involve a broad range of stakeholders and perspectives. NGOs are responsible for the momentum that led to the creation of various arms control regimes, such as the APMBC and the ATT, and have enriched and enlivened the discussions. Industry could exercise important and direct influence through their supply chains. The drone-industry for example is vital in combatting the misuse of commercial drones.

Accountability also requires a level of openness and transparency regarding our actions and policies. The Netherlands is pleased to sponsor the transparency in armaments resolution this year. Transparency continues – as ever – to be an important subject. Transparency also continues – as ever – to be one of the most prominent challenges in this field. We could remark that the low reporting rate to the ATT and UNRoCA is disappointing. Proper reporting is not fun. It is onerous and technical. Proper reporting is however a condition sine qua non for a substantive and fact-based debate, and as a confidence-building measure. So let’s all pull up our bootstraps and get reporting. If you want to be inspired on proper reporting, I refer you to the ATT monitor, which offers recommendations on good reporting.

Chairperson,

Thirdly, a responsible policy implies commitment or buy-in.

A number of arms control arrangements, such as the ATT, CCM and the CCW, suffer from insufficient financial support due to unpaid contributions. Financial reform is required. We urge all parties to invest in our arms control framework by paying their contribution on time and in full in order to safeguard our work for the future.

To show commitment, the Netherlands is taking on positions and roles in the different Conventions’ machinery, such as our coordinatorship on international cooperation and assistance of the CCM and Chairmanship of the Article 5 Implementation Committee of the APMBC. We have also expressed our interest in chairing the APMBC Meeting of States Parties (MSP) in 2021. In this way, we contribute – albeit in a modest way – to effective multilateralism in the field of conventional arms.

Chairperson,

To sum up: responsibility to us means being responsive when developments or actions call for action. Responsibility means being transparent and accountable. Responsibility means commitment and buy-in to secure our joined efforts for the future.

Thank you.