Excellencies, Colleagues,

Welcome to the Opening Session of the fifth Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty. I address this conference with a feeling of accomplishment. Latvia is a small country, but our ambitions for this year have been large. I am proud that that during the year we achieved the milestone of 100 States parties, saw detailed discussions of substance within the Working Groups, and have had a focus on gender and gender based violence.

The first five years in a Treaty are important. This is a key time to take stock, reflect on what has been achieved, and not be complacent on what more can be achieved. And we have a big collective aim with this treaty: reducing human suffering and contributing to peace and development.

Meetings are often procedural. It is easy to focus on process. This is the default for many of us. Where the substance is challenging, it is more comfortable to concentrate on the procedural issues that are routine to us. Of course the process matters. If we do not have finance, we cannot run these meetings, so we cannot have the discussions and agree the actions that are needed. It is important that these issues are addressed, and I am grateful to the Management Committee in particular for all their work on this.

But we have the opportunity to take decisions that will impact the world. The ATT can be a significant contribution to peace and security. And so we also need focus on substance. It is not one or the other. It is important that States meet their financial obligations under the Treaty. But the success of this treaty in the future will not be measured by its bank balance or numbers of attendees, but by how far it has realised its object and purpose.

There are always choices at conferences. To engage, or not to engage. Sometimes to focus on other issues that seem more pressing. At this meeting, I urge you to engage. With each other, and with the substantive issues. With the aim of achieving a strong final report, and in taking decisions that will impact the world positively.

As this is the start of the Conference, it is worth briefly reminding ourselves that the ATT is about ending human suffering and contributing to peace and development. At a time when multi-lateral agreements are under pressure, and some conflicts seem intractable, we need the ATT more than ever. It can make a significant contribution to peace and stability, to reducing humanitarian crises, and to reducing armed violence and crime.
I believe that these purposes are ones which we would all like to see achieved. And this means that as States we must be vigilant in meeting all legal obligations required under the Treaty, particularly those that refer to arms transfers themselves, and in holding each other account to do so.

This week we have the opportunity for that. Today we will have a High Level panel on gender, and I encourage you to engage in the debate on this thematic focus. There will be time for discussion of each of the Working Group topics, and there is a rich array of side events too, which provide further opportunity for in-depth discussion on substantive issues.

I now begin the Opening Panel.