Sixth Biennial Meeting of States (BMS6)

6 June 2016

Agenda Item 6: Consideration of the implementation of the POA

Statement by Darren Hansen, First Secretary, Australian Mission to the United Nations (Full Statement)

Chair

We gather here today to address what continues to be one of the most persistent threats to security and development throughout the world. Everyday more than 1000 people are killed by illegal firearms. The daily reality for people in many countries is the fear, suffering and economic chaos wrought by these arms –leaked out of stockpiles, illegally and irresponsibly bought and sold, smuggled and bartered in black and grey markets around the world.

Australia has lower rates of gun violence compared to many other areas of the world. This is not due to luck, or wealth, it is a matter of policy. 2016 marks the 20th anniversary of Australia’s comprehensive gun law reform – Called the National Firearms Agreement. The impetus for the national plan was a mass shooting in Tasmania’s Port Arthur in 1996, in which a gunman used two semi-automatic rifles to kill 35 people and wound 23 others. A
significant implication of the National Firearms Agreement was the 1996 National Buyback Program, under which firearm owners were compelled to hand-in firearms which they were no longer legally able to possess. As part of the Program, which ran in most states and territories from 1 October 1996 to 30 September 1997, approximately 640,000 firearms were surrendered to the government. Owners who relinquished guns received compensation.

Preventing instability, and promoting security and economic development, especially in our regional neighbourhood, are high priorities for Australia. Preventing the diversion and misuse of conventional arms is crucial to achieving stability and enabling development. The UNPoA provides a comprehensive framework of mutually reinforcing actions to prevent and combat the destabilising impact of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. We also acknowledge an achievement since BMS5 in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which recognises the critical importance for development in reducing transfers of illicit arms.

Conflicts in recent years have highlighted again the need for proper stockpile management. As small arms and light weapons flood into regions from the unsecured stockpiles, we are reminded of the need to develop a practical method for addressing this issue. In the case of Australia, we have secure facilities which are at relatively low risk of being seized and or diverted to the illegal arms market. This means we do not have the same expertise as other states facing these challenges more acutely. We call on all states to address their own surplus supplies of small arms and light weapons and we look forward to discussing this issue further over the coming week.
We agree with the observation in the Report of the Secretary-General that progress in implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) is of immediate relevance to implementation of the Programme of Action. We would support a similar reference in the outcome document of the BMS6. We consider that parties to the ATT can meet key commitments under the UNPoA through implementation of their legally-binding Treaty obligations to prevent the illicit trade and diversion of conventional arms.

We believe that the legally binding international ATT will deliver important security and humanitarian benefits and reinforce the objectives of the UNPoA. Australia is a strong supporter of the ATT which provides complementary frameworks for combating the unnecessary suffering caused by the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. We encourage States that have not done so already to ratify or accede to the ATT and further strengthen their efforts to reduce the devastation wrought by this trade.

Australia has strong legal restrictions in place on the possession and trade in ammunition and we would be open to a reference to ammunition in the BMS6 outcome document.

Australia could also support the proposal of several other delegations to include a reference to UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in the outcome document.

Australia urges the utmost efforts by States to implement the UNPoA. Our commitments under this instrument, and the ITI, provide us practical guidance and keep us to account in the reduction in death and suffering caused by the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.