Preparatory Committee for the Second Conference to review progress made in the implementation of the UN Programme of Action to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects

20 March 2012

Thematic debate: Implementation, international cooperation and assistance

Statement by Ms Claire Elias
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(Check against delivery)

International cooperation and assistance is vital to ensuring all States can realise the intended outcomes of the UNPoA, including reduced armed violence and fatalities, greater stability and improved conditions for enduring development.

Australia is committed to fulfilling its responsibilities under the UNPoA to provide financial and technical assistance. In 2010, we acted as facilitator on these issues at the fourth biennial meeting of states. At that meeting, States agreed on a number of additional measures on international cooperation and assistance. These included sharing knowledge and expertise on the implementation of the UNPoA, enhancing cooperation and increasing inter-agency coordination nationally, regionally and internationally, including with existing organizations and structures, recognising the role of the UN in building capacity to identify, prioritise and communicate assistance needs and public awareness campaigns on small arms and light weapons.

Through our aid program, Australia provides bilateral assistance to a range of small arms programs including in PNG, Tuvalu, DRC and Somalia. We support programs that complement small arms control activities by building sustainable government institutions, improving service delivery, and strengthening community capacities to resolve conflicts without reverting to violence. As part of our integrated approach to reducing and preventing armed conflict, we are supporting policing, legal, judicial and penal systems in Timor-Leste, Tonga, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Cambodia.

Australia believes that improving the mechanisms of international cooperation and assistance could deliver significant gains. Based on our experience, we would like to provide a few preliminary areas which the Review Conference could explore:

- Consideration should be given to enhancing the measurability of implementation and evaluating the effectiveness of cooperation and assistance, to ensure that resources are being allocated wisely and also to gain a better picture of which activities are working well and could provide useful precedents for other countries and regions.
Australia funds analysis of UNPoA implementation to improve its effectiveness, including by UNIDIR and Small Arms Survey, and we would support the call in the NAM paper for continued studies on the financial and technical needs of developing countries for the full implementation of the UNPoA.

- Strengthening mechanisms to help match needs and available resources. Australia utilised the POA-ISS tool to match our funding with the needs of the DRC. This is a valuable mechanism, but it will require refining so that it is accessible to both developed and developing states, and clearly articulates needs. The tool is also important for matching resources with regional needs.

- We need to improve the identification and articulation of national needs - through needs assessments and improved self assessment tools. However, we don’t necessarily believe that the way to do this is in national reporting – the burden of reporting is already significant.

- Mapping of donor expertise and improving understanding of donor requirements – there are certain requirements that we are required to fulfil not least relating to sustainability of outcomes and integration with development programs. Here, the work with OECD DAC guidelines has been important.

- At the Pacific Regional Workshop in Brisbane last month, Australia and other Pacific countries noted the importance of identifying national points of contact - these contact points are well positioned to identify and communicate priority areas for assistance from partners. Many national points of contact face resource constraints and competing priorities (in other words, being the national point of contact on small arms might not be their only role), and consideration could be given to providing specific tools and training to national points of contact to better equip them for the task.

- Ensuring the ongoing availability and effectiveness of the UNDP voluntary sponsorship fund to assist developing countries participate in all UNPoA meetings. Australia has been a significant contributor to this facility ($375,000 in the last review cycle). We call on others to contribute to this facility because it fosters inclusiveness, builds capacity and expertise, it broadens ownership and enhances implementation.

- Better integrating the UNPoA with other global security and development agendas, including disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, armed violence, transnational organised crime and drug trafficking and governance reform so that small arms programs are mainstreamed and the outcomes are sustainable.

- There are potential opportunities in the implementation of the International Small Arms Control Standards which will streamline policymaking, programming and practice on small arms control across the UN system of organizations. These standards could potentially be a useful tool for member states and other organizations. Australia has committed over $350,000 to support the development of the International Small Arms Control Standards.

- The establishment of trust fund arrangements, under the auspices of the United Nations, as suggested in the NAM working paper is a proposal that we believe merits further discussion.

- Given the broad agreement that international cooperation and assistance under the UNPoA requires more attention, and its cross cutting nature in addressing national, regional, global implementation, we recommend that international cooperation and assistance remain the focus for follow up action in the next cycle.