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
21 March 2012

Thematic debate: Follow up to the Review Conference on the Programme of Action

Statement by Ms Claire Elias
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Ahead of the Review Conference later this year, Australia looks forward to considering, with others, what further needs to be done within the UNPoA mandate to strengthen implementation.

Australia supports the approach in Japan’s working paper. Specifically, Australia would like to see the Review Conference identify a small number of areas on which to focus efforts in the next review cycle as a means of strengthening implementation. We do not think that this will detract from the implementation of other areas. We have said in previous statements that we consider that stockpile management and surplus disposal, regional organisations and international cooperation and assistance are important areas for follow up action.

The Review Conference should consider the appropriate frequency and nature of UNPoA meetings to be held over the next cycle – it should provide us with something that is structured and predictable – this particularly helps states with limited resources and capacity challenges. We agree with Japan’s approach in having the Review Conference map out the types and mandates of future meetings – to maximise the effective and efficient use of the next review cycle.

We will need to get the balance right between expert and political meetings. We greatly valued the Meeting of Governmental Experts last year and we would support more exchanges between experts. Ideally we could keep the BMS title, because this is in the UNPOA instrument, but ensure expert participation. We will need to work at this, ideally with a directive mandate. Expert meetings obviously feed into political commitment. The main thing is that these meetings should facilitate exchanges of views, lessons learnt and expertise, have clear objectives and outcomes and over time build improved understanding of and commitment to the UNPoA.
If we are looking at expert discussions, then we need to also take into account the pros and cons of MGEs and the meetings of Groups of Governmental Experts (GGEs). We note that the MGE format is useful because it involves all States, and this has a number of benefits, not least that the meeting outcome has better potential to take into account the challenges of all States, and therefore the outcome may be more practical and reflective of the issues of the ground. Meanwhile, a GGE format includes a smaller subset of States and is useful for exploring specific technical matters and testing their elements and feasibility before going open ended.

Building on the BMS4 outcomes follow-up section, Australia supports the following steps that would have merit in facilitating all meetings of the UNPoA:

- Early identification of the chair-designate
- Early development of meeting agendas in consultation with member states
- Support for increased engagement by all relevant actors, including as appropriate voluntary sponsorship programs, such as the UNDP voluntary sponsorship fund, to which Australia has contributed.

We have seen the positive impact of these early actions from your own preparations for this Preparatory Committee and Review Conference – we would like to see this institutionalised.

Beyond the follow up cycle, as raised by the delegation of the Netherlands yesterday, Australia sees some benefit in exploring the idea of an “implementation plan” from the Review Conference. The concept of an action plan or implementation plan has been developed and used by States in the context of other international instruments. This would be ambitious for the Review Conference, but the plan could assist states in unpacking, in a clear step-by-step way, a concrete approach to implementing their respective commitments under the instrument.

Thank you Madam Chair.