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: International Tracing Instrument (ITI)

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(Check against delivery)

Australia would like to echo other comments today that there is great potential to eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons through implementation of the ITI, but much more needs to be done to realise that potential. The constructive discussions by experts at the first Meeting of Governmental Experts in 2011 highlighted a number of implementation challenges in relation to marking, record-keeping and tracing. In this context, Australia sees that the Review Conference later this year could consider how some of these challenges can best be addressed.

Australia is a strong supporter of the tracing requirements of the ITI. Tracing is a fundamental part of prosecution and law enforcement to prevent the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. Australia believes that effective tracing relies on unique marking, firearms registration, and accurate and comprehensive firearms records. The Review Conference should assess the implementation and impact of these measures.

More broadly, we expect the Review Conference to affirm the importance of, and ways to better implement, strong legal and administrative frameworks at the national level but also across various internal jurisdictions. We should exchange best practices to improve whole-of-government implementation across multiple jurisdictions. Given the transnational nature of illicit trade in firearms, tracing relies on strong international cooperation and timely processing of requests between countries. We hope that the Review Conference can consider ways to strengthen law enforcement cooperation, as well as greater utilisation of useful electronic tracing tools, including E-trace, and databases.

The Australian Crime Commission (ACC) undertakes serial number tracing of illicit firearms and handles requests for such traces from both domestic and international agencies.
Working with partner agencies, the ACC’s illicit firearm tracing capacity only very recently assisted in the disruption of a major firearm trafficking ring which was illegally importing handguns into Australia from Europe. This shows that illicit small arms trade affects us all, and the importance of tracing.

To further enhance our domestic system we are conducting a national intelligence assessment to include trace data analysis to assist in developing an understanding of the Australian illicit firearm market. The recent disruption reinforces the need for such an assessment. We hope to be able to share key aspects and indicators of this assessment to assist others in their own self assessment of this challenge.

Australia continues to review and implement the ITI in parallel with taking steps towards ratification of the Firearms Protocol, and in relation to existing marking practices. We support the implementation of marking and tracing mechanisms that are clear, implementable and practical and in pursuit of this we need to enhance linkages between the work of UNODC, the Firearms Protocol and the ITI.

Looking at enhancing implementation in the next review cycle, we suggest the same principle that we have heard many times this week in relation to the UNPOA, and that is that we perhaps unpack the ITI and identify focus areas that experts from States could explore. We would see value in the Review Conference providing the opportunity for States to explore the continuing challenges faced in relation to import marking, such as forgery and challenges associated with the marking of firearms of some materials, for example polymer frames.

Australia fully supports the calls by some delegations today for enhancing implementation of the ITI in post conflict situations. On this point, I draw attention to the efforts by the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in this area, as the distinguished representative of the DRC outlined yesterday. This is a very good example of a well structured phased approach to the different international assistance dimensions of implementing the ITI and the UNPOA, including the provision of equipment as well as capacity building. This program was made possible through the useful ‘matching needs with resources’ tool.

Thank you.