UK Statement
Preparatory Committee for the Third UN Conference to Review Progress made in the implementation of the Programme of Action UNPoA) to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in all its Aspects

Thematic debate on progress made in preventing, combating and eradicating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects at the national, regional and global levels
Mr Chair, the United Kingdom remains fully committed to 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 (UNPoA). We commend you for your efforts to build consensus on the priority issues in preparation for this meeting. The UK stands ready to work with you to deliver a successful outcome at the Conference.

The UK aligns itself with the statement that will be presented on behalf of the European Union and its Member States. We would like to make a few additional points in our national capacity.

Mr Chair, we all know that illicitly traded arms continue to fuel terrorism, crime, the illicit trade in wildlife and threaten human security and development. This leads to instability and insecurity which reduce investment, trade and tourism and undermine national progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The United Kingdom remains committed to playing a leading role in international efforts to regulate the legal trade in arms and is a strong supporter of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). As the only legally binding instrument regulating the legal trade in arms, the ATT makes a significant contribution to the UNPOA’s objectives of combating the illicit trade in small arms and preventing their diversion and un-authorised re-export.

Our ambition for the Third Review Conference is to ensure that the UNPOA remains relevant and effective in delivering global counter proliferation objectives. To do this, it needs to be flexible enough to adapt to new developments, while also providing a firm political basis for taking comprehensive action to stop illicit flows. In addition to
strengthening the strategic link between arms control and development, we need to ensure that synergies with instruments such as the ATT are reinforced.

Mr Chair, we all know that the threat of small arms and light weapons depends on an uninterrupted supply of ammunition. Therefore, controlling the supply of ammunition can have an immediate impact on the intensity of armed violence. At a practical level, we also know that measures designed to secure or decommission weapons cannot be successful if they do not also address the stockpiles of ammunition usually stored in the same armouries. At BMS6, we failed to reach consensus on this issue, despite support from many Member States. We hope we can take a decisive step on this issue at the Review Conference.

Mr Chair, one issue that has not been fully considered in previous meetings is the threat posed by Man Portable Air Defence Systems (MANPADS). We believe that the increasing access to MANPADS by non-state actors should be viewed as an imminent and growing global threat. We know from past experience that even an unsuccessful attack can create panic and loss of confidence in commercial aviation, leading to loss of revenue. Without improvements in counter proliferation measures, the spread of MANPADS is likely to continue. We would welcome consideration of this issue at the Review Conference.
Progress on National implementation

Mr Chair, the UK operates one of the most rigorous and transparent arms control systems in the world. All export and trade licence applications are carefully assessed on a case-by-case basis against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria. We engage with legitimate arms exporters to help them comply with the law, whilst also vigorously pursuing those who carelessly or deliberately circumvent the legislation. The Government publishes statistics of all export and trade licenses issued, refused or revoked and is committed to meeting its reporting commitments across the relevant regimes and treaties.

The UK operates strict controls on possession and acquisition of firearms. Applicants undergo rigorous checks and the licenses regularly reviewed to ensure that those who no longer have the right to possess firearms promptly surrender them to the law enforcement authorities. The UK conducted two firearms surrender campaigns across the 43 police forces in 2014 and 2017, which resulted in over 16,000 weapons being surrendered.

Finally, Mr Chair, the UK continues to advocate destruction as the preferred solution for surplus stockpiles. Since 2016, we have destroyed over 5,700 of our own surplus small arms and light weapons.

Again Mr Chair, we commend you and your team for your efforts and look forward to working with you over the coming week.

Thank you, Mr Chair.