Let me begin by congratulating you on your appointment as President of this Review Conference and assure you of the United Kingdom’s full support over the next two weeks.

We have come a long way since we adopted the UN Programme of Action in 2001, but we still have a long road ahead. More than half a million people die every year from armed violence. Due to the wide availability and ease of use, small arms are the weapons of choice for terrorists and criminals alike.

These illicitly sourced weapons are used to facilitate the most heinous human rights violations and abuses. There is a clear connection between transnational criminals dealing in human lives, illicit drugs or illegal wildlife products and the availability of illicit small arms.

Across many communities, armed violence erodes the progress we have made resolving conflicts and building lasting peace. Attacks on civilians, peacekeepers and humanitarian actors are sadly all too frequent. The consequences can be dire and far reaching. Without security, children cannot go to school, women cannot participate meaningfully in society and governments and donors have to divert vital resources from socio-economic development to address the consequences of armed violence.
This is the context we should consider when reviewing how the POA has contributed to our goal of building peaceful societies and reducing human suffering.

The United Kingdom believes that the POA is as important today as it was seventeen years ago. It provides a vital framework for cooperation on arms regulation and drives national action to eliminate the supply of illicit weapons. But we are a long way from declaring full and effective implementation. There are three main challenges that we should look to address at this Conference:

Firstly, there are still too many illicit weapons in circulation, and their impact has been amplified by an uninterrupted supply of ammunition. We need to strengthen weapons surrender and recovery programmes to take these weapons off the streets. Linked to this, we know that diversion from unsecured national stockpiles remains an important source of weapons for the illicit market. We need to strengthen stockpile management and prioritise destruction of surplus weapons to prevent further diversion.

Secondly, the transnational nature of illicit arms trafficking means that no one country can successfully eradicate this problem on its own. Law enforcement authorities must have the right knowledge and tools to identify and trace illicit weapons in order to uncover supply routes and the traffickers. They also need access to regional and international information sharing frameworks.

Thirdly, since the last Revcon, additional arms control and disarmament instruments have been created, which can make a significant contribution to the POA’s objectives and provide concrete measures to realise the POA’s broad mandate. It is important that we consider how
these can be used in national implementation plans to enhance the overall effectiveness of actions taken under the POA.

We believe that the draft outcome document that you have circulated provides a good basis for negotiations. We look forward to working with you over the coming fortnight to deliver a successful outcome.