

Preparatory Committee for the United Nations conference to review progress made
in the implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and
Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects

Statement by
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on behalf of the European Union

General Debate

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(check against delivery)

Mr Chairman,

[1. I have the honour to take the floor on behalf of the European Union. The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Serbia and Montenegro, the EFTA countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this statement.]

2. The European Union congratulates you on your appointment as Chair of the PrepCom. We look forward to working closely with you and Ambassador Prasad at the Review Conference and the UN Secretariat (DDA) to ensure a successful PrepCom and Review Conference .

3. Much progress has already been made since the agreement of the Programme of Action, including at the July 2003 and 2005 Biennial Meetings. The EU considers that UN efforts to control small arms and light weapons, notably through measures on brokering, transfers, marking and tracing, end user certification, stockpile management and destruction, and especially capacity building, have to be intensified in order to alleviate the serious impact of SALW proliferation on conflict, development and human rights. In doing so, we should make best use of the 2006 Review Conference.

4. It is clear that the goal of the Review Conference is not to renegotiate or re-open the existing Programme of Action. It is a comprehensive and positive document, and although it is not perfect, it is a key starting point for enhanced action on small arms. The key issue at this point is to identify which integrated and parallel measures might be agreed upon to complement, elaborate upon, or enhance, the Programme of Action and its implementation. The UN PoA framework is ample enough to cover all relevant issues, but it cannot be exhaustive of all related issues. Some, such as an Arms Trade Treaty, which the Union supports, for example, are wider in scope than the UN PoA and will require later and separate action.

5. But let us focus first on implementation. We are far from achieving full implementation of the UN PoA in all countries and regions. Some regions need help with capacity building and the EU can assist in this. Other regions are lacking the political will to take action. In addition, in some areas we clearly need additional clarification and understanding as to what UN Programme of Action commitments mean in practice.

Mr Chairman

6. The European Union remains committed to work against the spread and misuse of small arms and light weapons around the world. The mandate for the Review Conference calls for a Review of the implementation of the UN Programme of Action. To prepare ourselves for this and whilst fully relying on your guidance, Mr Chairman, the European Union suggests that delegations focus - under the thematic discussions - on what we believe are crucial areas where significant obstacles to full implementation still exist. We believe these are transfer controls, including end-use certification, marking and tracing, brokering regulations, ammunition and the integration of small arms measures into development assistance.

Mr Chairman,

7. The European Union hopes that States will use the opportunity of this PrepCom meeting to identify and discuss follow-up measures to complement those parts of the UN Programme of Action that need to be strengthened.

We understand that there will be a Chair's text of the proposed draft final document available at this meeting and we hope that a way can be found to reflect key points from this discussion during the preparation process for the Review Conference.

8. Among the areas where further substantive work is required, brokering controls remain a high priority for the European Union. Illicit brokering and trafficking are recognised as among the main factors fuelling the illegal trade world-wide. The EU fully supports the First Committee resolution which calls for the establishment of a group of governmental experts on brokering to be convened as soon as possible after the 2006 review conference to decide on the measures necessary to combat the harm done by unscrupulous arms brokers. Important work has already been undertaken on this issue including the OSCE principles on the control of brokering and work undertaken by Norway and the Netherlands in raising the awareness and discussion of the important issues concerning brokering.

9. The EU attaches great importance to improved controls over the transfer of small arms and light weapons. This is an area which is already included within the UN Programme of Action but needs further elaboration in order to provide adequate guidance to all member states. The EU encourages the use of minimum common standards including criteria or guidelines to determine whether a proposed transfer of small arms or light weapons will aggravate conflict, repress human rights or undermine development. Such guidelines can also prevent a shipment from being diverted into the illegal market. The 1998 EU Code of Conduct on arms exports represents one of several examples of agreed regional instruments. Many other regions have adopted their own agreements or have called for increased co-operation on transfer controls within the framework of the Programme of Action. In particular, we note recent progress made on transfer controls in Central America, the MERCOSUR region, the Caribbean and the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa region. We strongly encourage these and other regions and states to voice their support for small arms and light weapons transfer controls during this meeting so that this can be fully considered at the 2006 Review meeting.

10. The question of the transfer of arms to non-state actors is another area of great relevance to be duly considered. The use of Man Portable Air Defence Systems to endanger civil aviation highlights the problems caused by transfers to non-state actors. The important issue of end-use certificates (EUCs) also deserves attention and should also be dealt with in the context of transfer controls.

11. Global standards on the marking and tracing of small arms and light weapons are essential if we are to understand, track, and crack down on the illegal trade in these weapons. The EU welcomes the hard work done by the Open Ended Working Group on Marking and Tracing, under the Chairmanship of Ambassador Thalmann. The EU hopes the instrument can be strengthened at further review meetings. The instrument is however a first and important step in the implementation of the Programme of Action. If it is applied by states with the necessary political will, the content of the instrument will help to discourage, and thus reduce, the illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons.

12. The EU is of the opinion that assistance should be provided to conflict-affected countries with the aim of fostering security, disarmament and demobilisation - as well as the

reintegration of ex-combatants into civil society - as an integrated part of post-conflict peace agreements and development strategies. We welcome work done elsewhere within the UN to develop integrated international standards for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration and look forward to their implementation. We also call for the sharing of additional best practice on small arms and armed violence reduction programmes. We hope that this meeting will draw lessons from existing or already concluded programmes, such as EU-supported initiatives in Cambodia and South Eastern Europe.

13. We also believe the easy availability of small arms and light weapons, and high levels of armed violence, act as a major barrier to development. It will be important to take this issue forward, in order to reach the Millennium Development Goals. In the light of the attention given by the High Level Panel and the Secretary General to the link between security and development, as well as the decision of the OECD to classify small arms reduction measures as official development assistance, the EU calls on States and development agencies to increase their capacity to control small arms and reduce armed violence. The European Union particularly encourages countries to explore the link between the two and to routinely address armed violence and arms availability as part of their development assistance programmes. Progress on this issue should channel more resources to the implementation of the Programme of Action in developing countries - and this support will be more effective because it will be tied to long-term development needs.

14. The fight against the illicit trade in ammunition is a pressing task. Surplus ammunition can be diverted from military stockpiles into zones of instability or get into the hands of terrorists or criminal gangs. Ill managed ammunition stockpiles threaten the population as they can damage the environment and pose the risk of explosion. The report submitted by the chairman of the OEWG on marking and tracing of SALW 2005 which was endorsed by consensus contains a recommendation to address the issue of SALW ammunition in a comprehensive manner as part of a separate process conducted within the framework of the UN. In 2005 the UN General Assembly for the first time adopted a resolution exclusively dedicated to the problems of conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus and the illicit trafficking of ammunition. The EU hopes that discussions at this meeting will reflect the importance of these long-neglected problems so that they can receive due consideration at the forthcoming Review Conference.

15. The new European strategy on SALW and their ammunition (adopted on 15/16 December 2005) formalises the Union's existing small arms policies. It is a strategy with a global geographic scope and makes several proposals for progress at the 2006 Review Conference, including all those mentioned above. The Strategy identifies Africa as the continent worst affected by the impact of internal and cross border conflicts aggravated by the destabilising influx of small arms and light weapons, but the strategy covers Eastern Europe, Asia and Latin America as well. The European Union expresses its readiness to provide support, both financial and technical, to governments, NGOs, regional organisations and arrangements engaged in the fight against small arms and light weapons trafficking and misuse, and the elimination of dangerous small arms stockpiles. We call on all states in a position to do so to provide such assistance and support for the implementation of the Programme of Action and to ensure such assistance is properly co-ordinated and targeted at those in greatest need.

16. The European Union also encourages this meeting to take full account of the work of relevant NGOs and civil society, which have always provided valuable contributions to our work and deliberations.

17. To sum up, Mr Chairman, the EU wants this PrepCom to point the way administratively and, as far as possible, substantively, to the detailed work that awaits us at the Review Conference itself. In this respect, Mr Chairman, you can rely on the full and consistent support of the European Union. We stand ready to take part in open and constructive discussions with all interested delegations and, with reciprocal engagement from all our partners, we are confident that we will be able to build a solid foundation for the Review Conference.

TEXT ENDS

* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.