



AUSTRALIA



AUSTRALIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

E-mail australia@un.int

150 East 42nd Street, New York NY 10017-5612 Ph 212 - 351 6600 Fax 212 - 351 6610 www.AustraliaUN.org

2006 Small Arms and Light Weapons Programme of Action Review Conference

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Statement

**Statement by HE the Hon Robert Hill
Ambassador and Permanent Representative
of Australia to the United Nations**

(Check against delivery)

Mr President,

Let me first extend my thanks to you and to the UN Department for Disarmament Affairs for your tireless efforts in preparation for this conference to review progress made in implementation of the UN programme of action to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. Your efforts during the extensive informal consultation process have been particularly valuable.

I should also say that Australia associates itself with the statement of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) to be delivered by my colleague and Chair of the PIF, the Ambassador of Papua New Guinea.

Australia is firmly committed to implementing the Programme of Action, and has enacted some of the most stringent laws and regulations regarding firearms ownership, import

and export in the world. Since 1996, firearms reform measures have occupied the attention of the highest levels of the Australian Government. Australia's domestic firearms control require the registration and licensing of all firearms owners, prohibit a range of automatic and semi-automatic long arms and handguns, and mandate minimum firearms safety training and storage requirements.

Australian law has substantial penalties for illegal possession or selling of firearms, and for cross-border trafficking offences. The Australian Customs Service has increased its capacity to detect illegally imported handguns. Australia implements strict and comprehensive controls and licensing procedures to regulate the transfer of small arms, including trans-shipments. All proposed exports of defence and related goods are subject to comprehensive, case-by-case Government review and licensing. Approvals are issued only for exports that are consistent with Australia's international obligations and broader interests, including security and human rights.

We also provide assistance to regional countries to address small arms and light weapons proliferation concerns. Australia has, through the Defence Cooperation Programme, constructed armouries and magazines to secure weapons and ammunition for regional military and police forces in Timor Leste, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and Vanuatu.

Australian overseas aid assistance has been active in supporting post-conflict reconstruction both in the region, including Bougainville, Cambodia, Timor Leste, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, the Solomon Islands, and further afield in Burundi, Rwanda and Sudan. Australia is also supporting the Regional Policing Initiative, in cooperation with New Zealand, Fiji and the University of the South Pacific. An innovative 5-year commitment, the aim of this initiative is to contribute to a safer, more secure and more stable region through improving basic policing skills through training and other practical assistance.

But recent events, including the renewed disturbances in Timor Leste and the Solomon Islands, clearly demonstrate that, despite the considerable achievements which we have made both collectively and individually since the Programme of Action was agreed in 2001, much more remains to be done, particularly with regard to capacity-building.

Those events underline the importance of effective and sustainable 'disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration' and security sector reform, including the vital component of providing alternate livelihoods for former combatants and discharged members of military and police forces. Other key elements we are working on include stockpile security and management, and sustainable peace-building.

It is also clear that our collective efforts could be greatly enhanced through more efficient coordination of international assistance, including that provided by donor organisations as well as by States. This requires effective needs analysis. Greater coordination in this area should be a key outcome of this Review Conference.

Mr President,

Australia strongly encourages Member States to acknowledge and advance the vital role of effective national transfer controls in raising the barriers against illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons through the adoption of strong language in this regard in the proposed outcomes document. Australia stands ready to discuss guidelines on transfer controls in this Review Conference.

This Review Conference must also address the issue of Man-Portable Air Defence Systems (MANPADS).

The proliferation of MANPADS to non-state actors with terrorist aspirations is a major concern. The sole purpose of MANPADS is to inflict catastrophic damage to an aircraft. Terrorists have used MANPADS against civilian aircraft. In the past few decades we have seen attacks against civilian and peacekeeping aircraft causing multiple deaths. And as the recent discovery of a terrorist cell in Switzerland has underlined, the terrorist threat to civil aircraft in major centres is very real. Thousands of MANPADS are unaccounted for world wide, and many are likely to be in the hands of terrorists and other non-state actors.

The adoption by consensus at UNGA 59 and 60 of First Committee resolutions on MANPADS demonstrates Member States' collective recognition of the serious threat to

civil aviation posed by the unauthorised access to and use of these weapons by terrorist and other non-state end-users. This Review Conference must call on Members States to restrict transfers of MANPADS to governments only.

Mr President

This Review Conference must result in a greater practical focus on the Programme of Action, aimed at implementing concrete actions towards our common goal of reducing the suffering caused by illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

Mr President, we undertake to work with you to achieve this goal.

Thank you.