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Statement

by

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Head of Delegation

at

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

New York

January 11, 2006

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation is most content to see you in the chair of the Preparatory Committee for the 2006 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. You have our fullest support in your efforts to make a success of this meeting.

Your initiative in undertaking prior consultations with Member States has helped in gaining greater clarity on the key questions that we require to address. Our deliberations, both here and at the Review Conference, should catalyze fresh thoughts on how to implement the Programme of Action more effectively. In this connection, we would like to express our appreciation for the important contribution that some organizations and institutions have made towards enhancing our understanding of the core issues before us, especially the UNDP and UNIDIR, as well as civil society organizations like the Geneva Forum, Small Arms Survey and IANSA. We have come better prepared to the review process, thanks to their efforts.

In this process, our singular focus will be to assess the progress made in the implementation of the Programme of Action. The Review Conference presents the international community with its first opportunity to strengthen it. It can do so by appraising its implementation and deriving lessons on more effective ways to address the serious challenges posed by the illicit trade in and easy availability of small arms and light weapons through practical actions and mechanisms.

The 2001 Conference was a landmark event. It succeeded in according centrality to the issue of illicit small arms and light weapons on the international security agenda. The Programme of Action, adopted unanimously, marked a significant step forward in committing States to developing and strengthening agreed norms and measures to reinforce their efforts in addressing the proliferation of illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. It reflects the sense of a shared commitment to a clearly enunciated goal. The need now is to implement it fully in a truly collaborative framework. This in turn requires greater cooperative efforts by all stakeholders, beginning with governments, and including civil society, non-governmental

organizations, voluntary agencies and regional and UN-related inter-governmental bodies. India is ready to continue its engagement in these efforts.

As we begin to prepare ourselves to assess national, regional and global implementation of the Programme of Action, it is well worth reminding ourselves of the devastating impact of the proliferation of illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. It continues to gravely endanger the security of States and communities. Use of small arms and light weapons by non-State actors continues to threaten global peace, disrupt social harmony, destabilize political systems and hamper development. The ready availability of illicit weapons fosters organized crime, drug trafficking, and illegal exploitation of natural resources and promotes violence, insurgency, and terrorism. India believes that efforts to combat and eradicate illicit trade in small arms and light weapons will contribute to the global efforts to combat terrorism and other organized crime.

India's full and effective implementation of the Programme of Action encompasses legal and administrative mechanisms for effective control and regulation of such weapons. They cover all aspects of their lawful possession, manufacture, sale, transport, stockpile management, transfer and export and import of arms and ammunitions. India follows a strict policy regarding exports that includes the requirement for end user certificates on a government to government basis and a ban on exports to countries under UN arms embargo.

Mr. Chairman,

In sharp contrast to mainstream disarmament efforts, the international community has made welcome, even if modest progress in addressing illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. We succeeded last year in reaching consensus on an international instrument to enable States to mark all small arms and light weapons, and to identify and trace illicit ones in a timely and reliable manner. Even though our preference was for a legally binding instrument, we joined the consensus, as did all Member States, since the instrument enjoins new commitments on States on marking and cooperating with other States in tracing. This significant achievement reflects our common commitment to achieve the objectives enshrined in the Programme of Action. What is required now is an early and full implementation of the

instrument. India had the privilege of chairing the Group of Governmental Experts on small arms, which provided the foundation for subsequent negotiations.

As regards illicit brokering, the General Assembly Resolutions 59/86 and 60/81 contain the parameters of further action. The Group of Governmental Experts, mandated by the resolutions, will consider further steps to enhance international cooperation on illicit brokering, which the Secretary General has been requested to appoint no later than 2007.

The Firearms Protocol of 2001 complements the Programme of Action. Despite a slow ratification process, the Protocol entered into force in July last year. We consider this significant since the Protocol is the first global, legally-binding measure addressing international small arms supply.

Mr. Chairman,

As for sequencing of issues to be taken up at the Review Conference, this should follow the structure of the Programme of Action. The 2001 document does not preclude the consideration of a wide range of issues, including those on which convergence was not achieved at that time. Since its adoption, the international community has become even more sensitized to the threat posed by terrorism. It should now be ready to express its firm commitment to prohibiting the supply of weapons to non-State actors. We would like the Review Conference to strengthen the Programme of Action by including measures that could deny terrorists access to small arms and light weapons, such as a commitment by States that the trade in these weapons would be channeled only through government authorized agents and by bringing in greater transparency in its trade.

On the future organization of work, we require some rationalization, perhaps through greater synchronicity of reporting and the scheduling of future Biennial Meetings and Review Conferences. Together with the Netherlands and South Africa, our delegation had presented a paper on this subject at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Biennial Meeting of Member States last July. We could consider this matter in the course of the thematic debate.

By far the most important task of the Review Conference is to oversee the implementation of the Programme of Action and draw lessons from it on how to do better. This would include not only actions that Member States could take nationally but also assistance efforts that could be taken by them for other States. The Biennial Meeting of States in July 2005 had provided testimony from a number of practitioners involved in small arms-related ground-level activity. In the process, they had also outlined some of the challenges that had come their way. The Review Conference should be an occasion to see what we could do to make available assistance through bilateral, regional and international cooperation. Also, the thematic debate on various aspects of the illicit trade could be useful in better understanding their relevance to the core concerns addressed by the Programme of Action.

The small arms process and, through that, multilateral diplomacy can take justifiable credit for, first, identifying the issues, and then, embracing a realistic and achievable framework to resolve them in the form of the Programme of Action. We need to carefully nurture the collective, coherent, cooperative and committed approach that has emerged as the hallmark of the Programme of Action and the small arms process. There is considerable goodwill among UN Member States on these and the convergence amongst them, which has a humanitarian impulse, should not be wasted. Every effort should, therefore, be made to maintain our discussions on a practical and functional track so that these are not distracted by consideration of issues which are being discussed in other more appropriate forums.

We are convinced that a forward looking, flexible and converging approach will take the Programme of Action further in realizing its objective of eradicating the menace of illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons. With that end in view, let us turn the review process into an opportunity to consolidate our achievements of the last five years and set actionable goals for the next phase of the small arms process.