Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates and Experts,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year, we mark the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, which was followed four years later by the adoption of the International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons.

Since the adoption of these instruments, a number of States have strengthened their relevant legislation and put in place other measures aimed at stemming the proliferation of illicit small arms. They have improved the security of stockpiles and destroyed surplus weapons, often with assistance provided by the United Nations in partnership with donors, regional organizations and civil society. Some States have integrated small arms action plans into national development strategies, or otherwise widened their approach to the issue. A growing number of States have increased transparency by reporting their small arms transfers to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms.

While significant progress has been achieved, serious gaps remain regarding implementation. In some regions, national reporting under the Programme of Action has remained low, and effective small arms control measures lag behind, including on brokering and on marking and record-keeping. Also, national reports are often unclear on what the challenges are in national implementation, and on how these could be overcome. Moreover, effective operational information exchange between States’ investigative and law enforcement authorities – and with INTERPOL – can still improve.

In order to address key implementation challenges and opportunities – including on international cooperation and assistance – the General Assembly has decided in 2008 to convene this open-ended meeting of governmental experts. Based on the extensive informal consultations by the Chair-designate, this expert meeting will focus primarily on issues related to marking, tracing and record-keeping.

Countries have made various commitments on marking and tracing of small arms, both through the International Tracing Instrument and the Firearms Protocol under the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. The commitments are in place, it is now their application in practice which needs to be pursued with vigour.

Uniquely marked weapons are concrete evidence for possible breaches of arms embargoes or for diversion. How weapons have arrived in conflict or post-conflict environments should be a matter of constant interest to those wishing to develop effective measures against illicit flows and uncontrolled circulation of arms.

Panels of Experts monitoring Security Council arms embargoes have found serial numbers of recovered weapons and have checked these with the authorities in the country of production, which
subsequently have banned arms brokers responsible for the diversion of the shipment from further contracts.

Such successful traces on the basis of a disclosure by a UN Panel of Experts show the potential of weapons tracing for combating the illicit trade in small arms.

The international tracing of weapons, especially in conflict situations, is still uncommon and usually limited to the activities of United Nations embargo-monitoring groups and some research organizations. However, tracing can be a critical contribution to identifying leakages in a State’s security apparatus, revealing where the security of weapons and ammunition needs to be improved.

Too often, tracing cannot be undertaken because of officials being unfamiliar with markings, because of inability to accurately identify a weapon type or model, because of a lack of adequate records, or because officials are not clear on procedures regarding contact with INTERPOL or with colleagues in other countries.

We are here this week to share experiences, good practices and challenges in this important area.

The United Nations stands ready to further support your work:

- by developing modules on marking, record-keeping and tracing as part of our wider effort to make available 'International Small Arms Control Standards' for the UN system and for those wishing to use expert guidance in putting small arms control measures in practice;

- and we support you by providing a compilation of requests from affected countries to be assisted in developing their capacity in marking, record-keeping and tracing, which is on your desk.

The importance of international cooperation and assistance cannot be overemphasized. This meeting is a great opportunity for Member States to look into ways and means of enhancing assistance and capacity-building. I sincerely hope that this week will help close the gap between requests for assistance and a structured follow-up by the international community. It would be a great achievement if next year’s Review Conference on the Programme of Action could conclude that true progress has been made in this area.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to laud the Chair-designate Ambassador Jim McLay and his team for their dedicated efforts in preparing for this meeting, which have been extensive, all-inclusive, highly transparent and thorough. I am also particularly pleased with the wide participation by expert UN system partners, INTERPOL, regional organizations and civil society.

Please rest assured that the Office for Disarmament Affairs and its partners within the UN system will do their utmost to provide relevant assistance to Member States and make this a meeting a successful one.

I wish all of you inspiring and fruitful discussions during the next five days.

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