Preparatory Committee for the Second 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
19 March 2012

Thematic debate: Reviewing progress made in national, regional and global implementation

Statement by Ms Claire Elias
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(Check against delivery)

Australia joins others in thanking you in your capacity as Chair and your team for the highly industrious, transparent and consultative approach in preparing for this Preparatory Committee meeting for the Second Conference to review progress made in the implementation of the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons (UNPoA).

From Australia’s perspective, we expect the Review Conference to 1) affirm the importance of the UNPoA, 2) evaluate of the implementation of the UNPoA and its impact, 3) identify areas of UNPoA implementation within its mandate for improvement and 4) map out a way forward to address these areas.

The UNPoA was developed by Member States, it is owned by Member States, therefore national implementation provides significant opportunities for gains in areas we have collectively deemed important. The UNPoA provides a comprehensive framework of mutually reinforcing elements to prevent the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. The Programme of Action remains relevant today. It requires a comprehensive approach to implementation.

The Review Conference should assess implementation of national measures such as adequate laws and offences, marking, tracing and record-keeping, transfer controls including requiring end-user certification, stockpile management and collection and destruction. Our own experience of national tragedy in 1996 led us to implement some of the strongest firearms laws in the world including tough penalties, compulsory registration and licensing, requirements for unique marking and compulsory record keeping, controls on import, export and transit, enforcement, and a collection and destruction program - more than 700,000 guns were surrendered and destroyed in two national firearms buybacks. A much more detailed outline of our implementation efforts can be found in our national report submitted online last week.
In our region we have also had notable successes in reducing the destabilising effect of illicitly-held small arms. In the Solomon Islands, for example, the Australian-led Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) removed 3,600 guns and 300,000 rounds of ammunition from the community during a 21-day firearms amnesty. Since the amnesty, almost 4,000 additional firearms have been removed from the Solomon Islands community. Collection and destruction of illicitly held small arms remains an important task for States.

Australia believes that stockpile security and surplus disposal is an important issue for UNPoA implementation. There have been concerted efforts in our region. For example, the Australian Defence Force has assisted countries in the region with weapons storage, stock control and weapons management practices. Since 2002 Australia has partnered with PNG to build seven armouries at key PNG Defence Force bases. In 2011, Australia supported the first comprehensive weapons audit, which accounted for all weapons of the East Timorese Defence Force, and this year two armouries are being constructed in East Timor with Australian support. Stockpile security remains an important issue for many member states. We believe there could be more done in our follow up to the Review Conference including exploring successes and best practices. On this point, I note the non-paper that Japan has referred to today. We fully support this approach and believe the Review Conference should identify areas within the UNPoA mandate that require further attention and map out types and mandates for future intercessional meetings in the next cycle to address these areas.

Australia’s biggest challenge in implementing the PoA has been the coordination of a number of national agencies and state jurisdictions. In our Federal system of government, the six State and two Territory governments have direct legislative responsibility for the control of firearms. Overcoming the challenges of consistency and coordination was important for the development of policy and legislation, and will continue to be important for ongoing law enforcement efforts. This is a good illustration of the fact that developed and developing countries face interagency coordination challenges. It is something that we all face and have to work on. In this context, in February 2012, the Australian Crime Commission began developing a contemporary national intelligence assessment of the illicit firearm market in Australia due for completion in July 2012.

We will address international cooperation and assistance later in the week. However, in discussing national implementation it is important to note that effective implementation requires states in a position to do so, to provide assistance to developing countries to enable national measures to realize the benefits of the UNPoA. Australia is committed to its responsibilities to provide financial and technical assistance. I also note the initiative of NAM to submit a non-paper on international cooperation and assistance – as a donor we welcome substantive exchanges in this area.

Regional organisations and networks have played an important role in facilitating and reinforcing national implementation efforts. As States increasingly cooperate with their regional partners, and as regional organisations strengthen in terms of credibility, mandate and resources, **regional implementation** will contribute even further to the UNPoA. Regional organisations provide a constructive forum to share lessons learned and best practices among countries with common interests and similar circumstances.
Regional organisations also play a crucial role in facilitating legal harmonisation, tracking and tracing, customs and enforcement cooperation, particularly relevant where borders are porous.

Australia is committed to working with our neighbours, regional organisations and with civil society to address the challenge of small arms proliferation in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. In partnership with the Pacific Islands Forum and Oxfam Australia, Australia recently hosted a Pacific Regional Workshop to enhance support for the UNPoA and strengthen its implementation. The workshop highlighted the value of regional implementation activities under the UNPoA, emphasised the potential benefits of allowing for regional reporting arrangements and also stressed the importance of identifying National Points of Contact. A number of concrete outcomes and recommendations are being finalised by Pacific countries and a PIF regional statement this week will provide more details on our views on regional cooperation.

Australia is also engaged in efforts to encourage knowledge sharing between small island countries in the Caribbean and the Pacific, and sees value in this cross-regional exchange. Despite geographic distance, these small island developing states share very similar experiences, face comparable vulnerabilities and capacity challenges.

Our experience has shown us that there are significant opportunities for regional cooperation to strengthen UNPoA implementation, there are also important lessons that we can share among regions, and more that regions can do together. Looking ahead, Australia considers that regional cooperation merits further attention and exploration.

At the global level, the UNPoA must have the full support of Member States to enhance its implementation, and to strengthen its integration in the UN system. States should endeavour to utilise the PoA-ISS, the online reporting template, and the matching needs with resources tool and we should commit ourselves to providing feedback for their ongoing improvement.

Australia is fully committed to utilising and supporting these tools. We have submitted our national report electronically. We have made a significant contribution to the UNDP voluntary sponsorship fund to enable developing countries to participate in these UNPoA meetings so that UNPoA discussions are inclusive, and the outcomes are practical and effective to those countries particularly facing the problem of small arms and light weapons illicit trade.

Along with effective implementation of the UNPoA - the negotiation of a strong, robust, and legally binding Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) is key to addressing the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons. A strong ATT will significantly contribute to achieving some of the goals of the UNPoA but it will not and cannot replace it. The Review Conference should be able to take stock of the complementarities and distinctions of these parallel processes and look for ways for these two UN processes to operate closely and to avoid the burden of duplication.

Much has been done to tackle the challenge of brokering – the Group of Governmental Experts in 2007 demonstrated the size and dimensions of this challenge. To increase awareness of the measures to combat brokering Australia has co-authored with Republic
of Korea the biennial General Assembly resolution on “Preventing and combating illicit brokering activities” at UNGA 65 and UNGA 63.

The Second Review Conference of the Geneva Declaration held in October last year highlighted small arms control as an effective means to reduce armed violence. States agreed to strengthen their efforts to integrate armed violence reduction and conflict prevention programmes into national, regional, and multilateral development frameworks and strategies.

We see value in considering how the UNPoA could better coordinate and integrate with the emerging global security and development agendas, including disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, armed violence, and transnational crime. An indication of the links across these agendas and the benefits that can come from integration, was provided in UN Security Council Resolution 2017 on Libya, which integrated conflict prevention, terrorism prevention, and small arms and light weapons issues including MANPADS into a UN special political mission and arms embargo. Australia believes that the International Small Arms Control Standards will facilitate enhanced coordination and mainstreaming of the small arms best practices into these agendas. Australia has provided significant support to the development of these standards.

Australia hopes that some of these assessments, achievements, lessons learned and challenges that I have identified today will help in approaching the issues for the Review Conference, and in refining some of the elements of the outcome document. We stand ready to assist you and your team, and all members states here to achieve a strong outcome in September.