NEW ZEALAND MISSION to the UNITED NATIONS

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2nd UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE TO REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION TO PREVENT, COMBAT AND ERADICATE THE ILLICIT TRADE IN SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS IN ALL ITS ASPECTS

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STATEMENT BY
ANTHONY SIMPSON
FIRST SECRETARY

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Madame President:

It is now more than a decade since the adoption of the UN Programme of Action (POA). As we have heard, a great deal has been achieved. The basic framework for controlling the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons has been established, and key elements further developed and elaborated. Considerable progress has been made in many countries towards implementing its provisions and establishing or strengthening relevant domestic institutions. Strong partnerships have been forged to support these efforts, bilaterally, regionally, and with a range of non-governmental partners.

But the POA has also faced setbacks, both diplomatically and with on-the-ground implementation. The UN process remains dogged by division and distrust. Accurate information on implementation remains incomplete, and what information we do have suggests significant gaps. Moreover, where POA-related measures have been implemented, we have little understanding of their impact or effectiveness.

Most fundamentally, the devastating impact of illicit small arms and light weapons and the problems of chronic conflict, instability and crime to which they contribute have not abated; indeed, in many parts of the world they have become more acute. Global victims of lethal violence total well over half a million people annually, in addition to the devastating impact small-arms related violence continues to have on the social, political and economic fabric of many communities. These figures considerably understate the tragedy unfolding in the most affected countries, where annual rates of violent death are running as high as 60 per 100,000 of population — most of these fatalities inflicted through the barrel of a gun.

All of which makes the POA, and related instruments such as the International Tracing Instrument, as relevant and important today as when they were agreed; and places a heavy responsibility on all of us to ensure this meeting is a success.

To be judged as such this Review Conference must at the most basic level agree an outcome, and seek to maintain the broad international support this process has enjoyed since its inception. But our delegation does not believe this alone to be sufficient. This outcome must also be credible, and genuinely add value to our future efforts. It must acknowledge the contemporary realities of the challenge we face; it must honestly assess our successes and our shortcomings; and it must chart a clear course for collective and individual action over the coming years.

Our work here must, of course, acknowledge the severity of the threat still posed to our communities by illicit small arms and light weapons, and strongly reaffirm our commitment to combat this through full and effective POA and ITI implementation. It must consolidate and reaffirm key outcomes and decisions from our POA discussions since 2001, and acknowledge other relevant developments, both positive and negative.

Madame President:

Our delegation shares the view that important gaps remain in the POA framework. We hope progress can be made towards meaningful discussions on the role of ammunition in effective measures to combat the illicit trade in and use of small arms and light weapons. Similarly, we would welcome further guidance to assist states to address implementation challenges in areas such as border controls.
However, the most urgent priority for the POA process is not its further normative development; but rather achieving full and effective implementation of existing provisions. It is towards this challenge we must dedicate our primary focus and effort over the coming two weeks. This means identifying key implementation challenges, and ways of providing states with what they need to overcome them.

There are a number of ways in which we can do so.

First, we need to provide states with the tools they need to effectively implement the POA.

A wealth of such tools now exist at the regional and global levels, such as guidelines, model legislation, and INTERPOL’s Firearms Programme; and CASA’s finalisation of the International Small Arms Control Standards promises to provide an invaluable new resource. It would be timely to consider ways of enhancing awareness of these tools, and of facilitating their voluntary uptake. Consideration should also be given to the developing additional tools and resources, such as practical mechanisms to help states identify relevant sources of expertise.

National reporting is also an important tool for monitoring implementation and identifying areas where assistance would be welcome. Many small states, however, face significant challenges in reporting regularly; and we would support consideration of practical steps, such as simplified, user-friendly templates and a allowing more active role for regional organisations, that could facilitate more regular and meaningful reporting while reducing compliance burdens.

Secondly, we must strengthen the important partnerships that have emerged to assist states in POA and ITI implementation.

One of the most positive developments since 2001 has been the significant contribution made by regional and sub-regional initiatives, instruments and institutions. Similarly, civil society has long played a vital role in small arms advocacy and in supporting POA implementation. These partnerships should be reaffirmed, their contributions acknowledged, and further such cooperation encouraged and supported.

Similarly, we must find pragmatic ways to enhance cooperation and coordination with related international organisations and processes. Important complementary work is being undertaken by international expert bodies, such as INTERPOL, the World Customs Organisation, and the UN Office for Drugs and Crime, through its activities to implement the Firearms Protocol to the UN Convention to Combat Transnational Organised Crime. Enhanced engage with these processes will be essential to capture potential synergies and avoid duplication of effort. We also need to deepen our engagement with industry, in particular to ensure POA and the ITI provisions remain relevant and effectiveness in the face of developments in weapons manufacture and design.

Thirdly, we need to ensure states possess the financial, technical and human resources they need for effective implementation.

This requires stronger mechanisms for resource mobilisation both domestically and internationally, and we welcome the ideas floated this week in this regard. It also means ensuring states seeking assistance can readily identify and source it, and that the assistance they receive is consistent with their specific needs and priorities. This in turn
requires strengthening states’ capacities to assess their needs and identify priorities for POA implementation and assistance; and ensuring providers and recipients of assistance can more accurately assess whether assistance provided has been effective. Important progress has been made in developing such tools in recent years. Further development and refinement of such tools and facilitation of their voluntary uptake must be a priority for the coming Review Cycle.

Fourthly, we need to chart a clear path for our work over the coming years.

This requires agreeing a specific programme of meetings for the next Review Cycle. POA meetings provide our only mechanism for monitoring and supporting implementation. Incremental progress has been made since 2001 towards developing these meetings into a more coherent and systematic process, most notably through steps agreed at BMS4. A key goal for this meeting must be to consolidate these agreements and translate them into a clear programme of work by deciding the number, timing and format of meetings. Given the central focus increasingly placed on practical implementation, we see merit in at least one of these being an Open-Ended Meeting of Governmental Experts (MGE). Last year’s inaugural MGE clearly demonstrated the utility of this format.

It would also be desirable to agree tentative themes for each meeting, based on priorities identified by states. Should this not be possible, we at least need to ensure themes are selected a minimum of a year in advance, to ensure adequate preparation time; and to acknowledge those issues identified as shared priorities. During New Zealand’s role as Chair of last year’s MGE, a number of common priorities emerged from our regional consultations. These included developing and implementing national SALW legislation, regulations and procedures; enhancing management of SALW stockpiles; strengthening capacities for weapons collection, storage and disposal; developing national frameworks to address illicit brokering; strengthening the capacity and effectiveness of customs and law enforcement agencies, and promoting cooperation and information-sharing between them; and designing and implementing national action plans and determining the roles and functions of national coordinating bodies and POA points of contact. We hope these issues will be adequately reflected in this meeting’s outcomes.

In conclusion, Madame President:

My delegation believes that the POA process is entering a new phase; one in which the divisive political issues that have divided us should increasingly give way to more productive discussions on practical implementation. It is up to us, however, to determine whether this is the case; and our discussions here provide an important test of our willingness and capacity to do so.

The task ahead of us is undeniably challenging. The time available is short, and we must focus our efforts on goals that are achievable, but also meaningful and of practical value. We must be disciplined in our use of time, and approach the most sensitive issues in a spirit of patience, flexibility and mutual respect. Your efforts to date, Madame President, have provided us with the platform we need to achieve a successful outcome; and New Zealand is committed to working with you, and with all delegations, to ensure this is accomplished.