

2008 Biennial Meeting of States: UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons: NZ statement on international co-operation and capacity building.

Thank you Mr Chairman.

New Zealand very much supports the approach taken by you to this meeting – that is, to encourage an interactive discussion and to focus on priority issues during our limited time together. We thank all those that have been involved in the thorough preparations for this meeting. It is essential that the international community prioritise in order to be effective. As such, the first discussion topic – international co-operation, assistance and capacity-building is very appropriate, as it is a fundamental cornerstone of the Programme of Action.

For NZ's part, we continue to work to enhance our implementation of the Programme of Action in all areas. With respect to this morning's topic of discussion, we have continued to make progress on assistance to countries within our region. These include assistance provided to the Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu with the aim of helping defence and police forces to improve the security, storage, maintenance and management of their weapons.

Specifically, in addition to the building of several new armories for the Papua New Guinea Defence Force and the Samoan Police, last year New Zealand Defence Force engineers completed a joint project to rebuild the Tongan Police Armoury, and has conducted follow-up inspections and made recommendations for further refinement of the project. New Zealand, along with other regional partners, has made an effective contribution to post-conflict measures in Bougainville and the Solomon Islands, including destruction of weapons, reintegration of ex-combatants, and ongoing assessment of small arms and light weapons issues in the post-conflict period.

There is still, however, considerable work to be done in refinement of international co-operation as a whole. New Zealand very much supports activities aimed at assisting countries to assess their own needs and requirements. We thank the representative of UNIDIR for her presentation this morning, which noted, aptly, that many states lack the resources or know-how to request such assistance. It is often the case that, in small countries, the task of reporting and assessment can be an overwhelming burden that falls to a very limited number of officials, whose duties are not limited to small arms and light weapons issues.

In this respect, we note also that for many countries assessment that does not lead to assistance wastes already-scarce public resources, so it is important for the integrity of the programme that assessment is well-focused and translates into action. Too often, assistance programmes, while well-intentioned, do not represent the most effective co-operation that both donor and recipient desire and can divert energy to areas that are not priorities for the country concerned. It is particularly true in the area of small arms and light weapons that there is no one size fits all approach, and that assistance must pay close attention to the specific obstacles before each recipient state.

In this respect, New Zealand was pleased to provide support to the project being run by the UN Institute for Disarmament Research designed to identify assistance needs in the Pacific region. We hope that the results of this project will assist both in updating knowledge of current and ongoing needs in the Pacific, and in helping find the best fit for ongoing work.

Simultaneously, New Zealand is considering what new initiatives might be pursued in our region and is about to undertake a stock-take of past and current assistance projects. We hope to coordinate this stock-take with the activities of recipient countries, other donors and the UNIDIR project to develop an effective platform to support Pacific countries in their implementation of the Programme of Action.

In closing, we would like to pose a question to the UNIDIR representative as to how, in her view, we can move forward on the ongoing problem of needs assessment in small states.