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Fourth Biennial Meeting of States on the United Nations 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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Strengthening of the follow-up mechanisms of the Programme of Action, and preparations for the 2011 Experts Group meeting and the 2012 Review Conference

Statement by Professor Philip Alpers Australian Delegation

(Check against delivery)

Thank you Mr Chair

We warmly welcome your decision to include in the agenda for this Biennial Meeting of States an item on strengthening the follow-up mechanisms of the Programme of Action. We believe this discussion is timely now that the Programme of Action is nearing its tenth year. We also believe that strengthening the follow-up mechanisms will have significantly positive benefits for the implementation of the POA.

Mr Chair

We consider that two key questions remain largely unanswered and need additional focus. These are: is the POA being implemented; and is the implementation that is occurring having a measurable impact on the illicit trade of SALW, in all its aspects? Having a clearer picture of the answers to these important questions in the future will be essential to making decisions on issues like what areas of the POA should future meetings focus, what efforts are needed internationally, regionally or nationally to help address gaps, and what methods of implementation have worked, and why.

The POA contains many substantive provisions for dealing with the illicit trade in SALW, but provides little guidance on process, institutions or follow-on mechanisms. What main mechanisms we have are mandated by the UN General Assembly – the Biennial Meetings of States, the Review Conferences and voluntary national reporting. These are essential to assessing implementation of the POA, however much more can be done to promote concrete implementation.

On behalf of the Geneva Process Working Group on the BMS Australia presented to the Third Biennial Meeting of States in 2008 some proposals on how to strengthen the implementation process. Your paper, Mr Chair, builds upon these and identifies a number of concrete steps this BMS and future meetings could take to strengthen follow-up mechanisms.

Mr Chair

We appreciate you setting aside time at this BMS to consider these issues. Follow-up mechanisms should enjoy dedicated consideration at future meetings to ensure they are functioning as intended and identify ways in which they can be improved.

On meetings on the POA themselves, we support future Biennial Meetings of States continuing to have identified themes to allow for practical, in depth examination of issues. Each Biennial Meeting of States should also retain an open, flexible session to allow an exchange of views on current or emerging issues, like we had yesterday.

There would be much to gain from promoting coherence and continuity between meetings under the POA. We must avoid each meeting being perceived as being unrelated to previous and future meetings. We consider that each Biennial Meeting should aim to build on the work and discussions from previous meetings, and identify priorities for future implementation work in the lead up to the next meeting.

Review Conferences will be an important opportunity to both review the implementation of the POA, and recommend future action under the POA. Review Conferences should have the mandate to consider areas which ought to be covered by the POA. We support the proposal from UNODA that a preparatory meeting for the 2012 Review Conference be held in the first half of 2012.

We also support efforts to systematise meeting cycles under the POA. For instance, we see a benefit in moving to a regular six-year cycle of meetings, where a Review Conference is followed by a series of Meetings of Governmental Experts and Biennial Meetings of States. A mixture of Meetings of Governmental Experts, Biennial Meetings and Review Conferences will, over time, help to build a strong implementation culture for the POA.

The Chairs of Biennial Meetings of States and the Review Conferences should be designated early and commence consultations as soon as possible. This will help to promote greater continuity and lay the ground work for successful meetings. We also endorse the proposal of UNODA that this Meeting designate the Chair of the Meeting of Governmental Experts in 2011 and set out its principal themes.

Mr Chair

On national reporting, we agree with your proposals Mr Chair that there should be a focus on streamlining and synthesising reporting formats, taking into consideration the work of UNODA and UNIDIR.. This will help to improve comparability of reporting. Reporting burdens on States are already significant, and therefore we continue to support reporting being biennialised. This should help improve the quality and substance of reports. We support encouraging States to include information in their national reports on specific steps taken since the last Biennial Meeting or Review Conference to fulfil commitments undertaken.

The analysis of national reporting, undertaken this year by Sarah Parker of the Small Arms Survey, is a very useful tool for our deliberations and strengthening the value of reports. We would encourage States to support future analyses.

Mr Chair

A voluntary sponsorship programme would be a concrete contribution to the full implementation of the POA. A sponsorship programme's central purpose should be to promote participation in international meetings under the POA of least developed States and those deeply affected by the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons. Such participation has the added benefit of increasing awareness of the POA and enhancing ownership over it, as well as building capacity of those States to implement the POA. Importantly, sponsorship programmes also serve to bring different perspectives to international discussions and allow more comprehensive engagement.

Such programmes have successfully contributed to the implementation of other arms control and disarmament instruments. Australia has been an active contributor to existing sponsorship programmes and we would certainly look favourably at contributing to a programme under the POA. We have provided AUD100,000 to the UNDP to support the attendance at this BMS of a number of delegates from States in the Pacific and South-East Asia, as well as civil society representatives.

We consider that a sponsorship programme would be both feasible and a positive step to promote implementation of the POA. The outcome document should request the UN to proceed with establishment of a voluntary sponsorship programme.

Mr Chair

Consistent with our earlier points, we consider there is much merit in considering other options identified in your discussion paper, including requesting the assistance of an appropriate resource person to prepare a progress report on implementation, establishing a related toolkit and building an implementation road map to 2012 and beyond. We see these proposals as being inherently linked. We would be happy to consider these proposals in detail, both here and at future meetings.

Ultimately we consider that the POA would firmly benefit from enhancing a strong implementation culture, assessing how implementation is progressing and ways it could be improved. We recognise that a lot more must be done to fully realise the goals of the

POA and that progress will be incremental. However, if progress can be properly assessed and measured then we will all be on a stronger footing in which to ensure the fulfilment of the POA's objectives. We look forward to working with you, Mr Chair, and others to fulfil this goal.

Thank you.