Statement by the Arab Group

The Preparatory Committee for the Fourth United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspect

12-16/2/2024

New York
Madam President,

At the outset, the Arab Group would like to express its sincere congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the Fourth Conference to Review the Implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action to Combat the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (Programme of Action). The Group expresses its readiness to constructively engage in the proceedings of the conference with the aim to achieving a successful consensual conference.

Madam President,

The Member States of the League of Arab States attach increasing importance to combating the illicit trade in and supply of small arms and light weapons. The League of Arab States convenes periodic meetings of Arab national focal points for the United Nations Programme of Action. These meetings aim to enhancing regional cooperation and national implementation programs, particularly given the catastrophic impacts of the unprecedented rise in the illicit supply of small arms and light weapons in the Arab region, and what appears to be the resort by some governments to supplying weapons to terrorist groups to prolong armed conflicts, and pursue malign political objectives in contravention of the simplest principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. This phenomenon has severely affected the security, humanitarian, and economic sectors.

The Arab Group stresses the importance of the Programme of Action as a pivotal international tool to address the challenges resulting from the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects, particularly in the light of the increasing tensions, crises and armed conflicts taking place in various regions of the world, especially in the Arab region. This has exacerbated the challenges associated with
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the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons with the assistance of some States and non-State actors.

Madam President,

The adoption of the Programme of Action in 2001 was the result of lengthy international negotiations that succeeded in reaching a balanced text on which consensus could be achieved outside any other controversial frameworks. The Group emphasizes the importance of maintaining the consensus-based and objectively balanced nature of the Programme of Action to ensure its continuity, with a focus on its full implementation on a broad scale. Therefore, the Group underscores that the Review Conference is primarily concerned with reviewing the Programme's implementation rather than amending its texts, altering the scope of its mandate, or changing its voluntary nature as a consensus-based political declaration.

From this standpoint, the Arab Group looks forward to the development and adoption of a consensual and balanced outcome document for the Fourth Review Conference of the Programme of Action, building on and drawing from the consensus outcomes of previous meetings of States and review conferences of the Programme of Action, in a manner that meets the concerns of all States and reflects the nature and challenges of the various regions.

Madam President,

The Arab Group calls for the promotion of the Programme of Action as a consensual United Nations instrument whose main purpose is to build confidence and strengthen cooperation among States to eradicate the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons. Taking the foregoing into consideration, the Programme of
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Action must not affect the legitimate right of States to possess and acquire conventional weapons to defend themselves as per Article 51 of the UN Charter. The Arab Group stresses the need to distinguish between combating the illicit trade and supply of arms — which is the main objective of the Programme of Action — and the imposition of politicized, discriminatory or monopolistic restrictions on the legitimate trade in conventional arms amongst Governments.

The Arab Group affirms that the Programme of Action is an international framework, stressing the need to ensure that its implementation does not overlap with any other international mechanisms or legal instruments. The Group emphasizes the need to avoid the inclusion of contentious topics or ambiguous mechanisms and criteria not addressed by the Programme. This ensures that the focus remains on the technical aspects of the program itself, preventing the diversion of time and effort towards politicized sub-discussions unrelated to the Programme's text or its intended objectives.

In this regard, the Arab Group believes that it is necessary to focus on strengthening the implementation of the Programme of Action and bridging the gaps that prevent it from achieving its required effectiveness. It further calls for a clear distinction between the new framework on conventional ammunition, which is still under development, and the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons, established and functions independently for over 20 years. This is particularly crucial given the varying scopes and technical dimensions of both initiatives.

The Arab Group looks forward to a comprehensive discussion on the issue of the diversion and transfer of weapons to unauthorized actors, including armed and terrorist groups, as well as the illicit transfer of small arms and light weapons by
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States to any groups, entities, or persons without prior authorization from the government of the receiving State.

Regarding the use of new technology in the manufacturing, marking, and tracing of small arms and light weapons, the Group emphasizes the significance of improving the implementation of the Programme of Action and the International Tracing Instrument. Nonetheless, the Group proposes the exploration of options to tackle challenges related to modern technologies. These options should take into account the diverse legal frameworks of states, the technological disparities between developing and developed countries, the significance of technology transfer, and the necessity of providing unconditional financing. Additionally, capacity-building for developing countries should be prioritized before considering additional political commitments for these States.

Madam President,

The Group has consistently emphasized the importance of strengthening international cooperation and technical assistance for the implementation of the Programme of Action and the International Tracing Instrument. This includes supporting the capacities of States with relevant modern technologies and capacity-building efforts, particularly in the areas of stockpile security and border security. Such support must respect the sovereignty of States and must not impose conditions that contradict the spirit and objectives of the Programme or discriminatory restrictions, including illegal unilateral coercive measures. Additionally, the Group recognizes the significance of ensuring that international cooperation and technical assistance align with the specific needs of each country and do not interfere with its development priorities or diminish resources allocated for official development aid.
With regards to the implementation of the Programme of Action, the Group believes that the UN mechanisms for providing financial and technical assistance and capacity-building in developing countries must be institutionally strengthened to meet the desired level in supporting the capacities of developing countries and building their capacities to combat the illicit supply of small arms and light weapons in all its aspects.

In conclusion, Madam President, the Arab Group refers to its submission of a comprehensive working paper that reflects the concerns and priorities of the Group and looks forward to including its provisions in the final outcome document of the Review Conference.

The Arab Group wishes success for this meeting and promises to do its utmost to support you in order to reach consensual results.

Thank you.