UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons Preparatory Committee

Thematic debate: Preventing, combating and eradicating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects at the national, regional and global levels

UK Statement

Madam Chair

Let me first add my congratulations to you on your election, and to the bureau for their election. We also give our thanks to the Secretariat for their support. Rest assured you will have the full support of the UK delegation.

The UK remains firmly committed to supporting international, regional and national efforts to control small arms and light weapons and minimise their diversion and misuse, including through the Programme of Action and International Tracing Instrument. This year’s 4th Review Conference offers us an opportunity to strengthen our collective efforts to reduce the impacts of weapons that cost hundreds of thousands of lives every year, threatening security and sustainable development, and fuelling conflict, crime and terrorism. We should explore new ways of tackling existing threats from illicit small arms, and at the same time better understand emerging threats.

With this in mind, with regard to our priorities we look forward initially to advancing discussion in two areas mandated by BMS8.

Firstly, we are keen to discuss ways we can collectively improve cooperation and assistance, including through better coordination and sharing of information on where support is needed. The UK has a long record of supporting efforts to control small arms and light weapons, and we continue to recognise the importance of regional efforts in this space, such as the Caribbean Firearms Roadmap. We also echo other delegations in noting the important contribution made by civil society to support delivery of commitments under the POA.

Secondly, we must also address the risks presented by new and emerging technologies such as 3D-printed, modular, and polymer weapons, as well as the opportunities new technologies present to our efforts to combat the illicit trade in small arms. Many of these technologies are not no longer emerging: they have emerged. We are already seeing them appear in our law enforcement and counter-terrorism efforts. But we have no collective approach or understanding of the risks and opportunities. We should seize the opportunity this year by establishing a new Open-Ended Technical Expert Group. This should complement, and not detract, from our existing work.

In addition, as many other delegations have highlighted, we should look to exploit complementarities with related instruments. We were pleased to see the adoption of the new Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management, and we should use the Review Conference to better understand how the POA and the Global Framework can work together to approach challenges from unsecured and illicit ammunition. Similarly, the Arms Trade Treaty remains a key multilateral tool in addressing the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons through its object and purpose: to create a well-regulated, legal trade in conventional arms. The Review Conference, coinciding this year with the 10th anniversary of the signing of the ATT presents an opportunity to review, refresh and redouble our efforts to strengthen action in this space, and make full use of all multilateral instruments.

The UK also recognises the differentiated gendered impacts of small arms and we look forward to building on existing work to bolster women’s participation in small arms processes and to the eradication of gender-based violence. This impact is reflected in the link to
disarmament in our own Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan, which includes commitments to improve our own data collection on the gendered impacts of small arms policy and control.

Finally, Madam Chair, we would echo your words form this morning “to let us continue to move forward, never backwards” and support the need to avoid rolling back language agreed at previous meetings and maintain previous progress.

Thank you and we look forward to working constructively throughout this process over the coming days.