Statement by the Head of the Russian Delegation at the Fourth Review Conference on the Implementation of the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects

(New York, 17-28 June 2024)

Distinguished Madam Chair,
Distinguished Colleagues,

The Russian Federation gives priority to the whole range of issues related to the implementation of the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and the International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit SALW. We believe that the current Review Conference is to become an important stage in the implementation of the goals and tasks of combating the illicit proliferation of arms by the international community.

We call on our colleagues to consolidate the positive momentum in countering illicit trafficking in SALW that was achieved during the review at the seventh and eighth Meetings of States on the Implementation of the Programme of Action in July 2021 and June 2022, respectively. It is noteworthy in this connection that a number of important provisions of the outcome documents of the Meetings were reflected in UN General Assembly resolutions 76/232 of 24 December 2021 and 77/71 of 7 December 2022. We also note the effectiveness of co-operation during the work of the Preparatory Committee for the Conference this February.

We are convinced that the work to improve the practical impact of the Programme of Action remains relevant and requires continuing a substantive discussion of the development of effective measures to prevent the diversion of SALW into illicit trafficking.
Small arms and light weapons remain some of the most widely used weapons in regional and local conflicts which lead to numerous human casualties. Terrorist and criminal structures are continuously expanding illegal SALW arsenals and improving their qualitative parameters, and, as a result, civilians suffer.

The uncontrolled proliferation of SALW is fuelled by conflict situations persisting in certain regions of the world and States, gaps in national export control regimes, and cross-border corruption schemes. Inter-state transfers of small arms and light weapons are often made for non-state actors. Quite often, in pursuit of profit or for other short-term considerations the supplier does not think where and for what purposes a specific SALW consignment will be used and in whose hands it will ultimately end up.

Moreover, numerous brokers operating on the international arms market do not always exercise due responsibility. In this context, we can also mention individual States that possess excessive SALW stockpiles and are not enough responsible and selective in carrying out dubious arms transactions.

In addition, there is a long-standing problem of SALW being manufactured under expired licences or even without licences from the countries holding the copyrights. As a rule, weapons manufactured this way are exported to third countries. Often, weapons of rather dubious origin and, at times, even with blatantly falsified markings, end up in militarily and politically unstable regions. I would like to note that many are well aware of such schemes. This is exactly how SALW end up in the hands of terrorists, illegal armed groups and organised crime.

We believe that all these problematic issues require the closest attention of the international community. The need to intensify coordinated action in this area is becoming more and more urgent. For our part, we consistently propose a number of specific measures that could make a real contribution to curbing the illicit trafficking in SALW, namely:
Firstly. To introduce a universal ban on transfers of all types of SALW to entities not authorised by the governments of receiving States.

Secondly. To ensure that States in territories under their jurisdiction strictly regulate and directly control brokering activities related to arms export and limit as much as possible the number of arms brokers themselves.

Thirdly. To also prohibit re-export or subsequent transfers of imported SALW without the written consent of the initial exporting State.

Fourthly. To prevent the manufacturing of SALW without licences issued by the State possessing the relevant technologies and to suppress the practice of its manufacturing under expired licences or after minor export-oriented modernisation.

In conclusion, I would like to note that only a comprehensive solution to the accumulated problems will contribute to actually reducing the risks of diverting SALW into illicit trafficking and thus ensuring appropriate conditions of equal and indivisible security for all members of the global community without exception.

Thank you for attention.