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UNGA68 First Committee: thematic statement on conventional weapons

30 October 2013

**Statement by Ambassador Peter Woolcott
Australian Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Geneva
and Ambassador for Disarmament**

(Check against delivery)

Mr Chairman,

More than any other category of weapon, conventional arms kill, maim, and bring unspeakable suffering to millions around the world every year. The unchecked availability and misuse of these weapons and their ammunition fuel conflict and instability, threaten innocent lives and livelihoods, and result in widespread violations of humanitarian law. These weapons are, without doubt, the world's biggest killers.

In the past year however, the international community has made considerable progress in addressing the threat posed by the illicit transfer, accumulation and misuse of conventional weapons. In the slow-moving field of disarmament where gains are hard fought and hard won, this progress has brought hope to those individuals and societies most affected by the uncontrolled spread of conventional arms.

Mr Chairman,

The adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) on 2 April by the General Assembly was not only the culmination of seven years hard work. It was the result of near universal recognition of the need to better regulate the conventional arms trade, to reduce the impact of armed violence and to save lives. We pay special tribute to all those, including from civil society, who worked tirelessly to bring the Treaty into existence in 2013. What we now have is a strong, robust and effective instrument that will make a real difference, but only once it is effectively implemented. Here our work begins, again.

First, we must focus on achieving the Treaty's early entry in force. With already 114 signatures and eight ratifications, we are well on the way towards reaching this goal. As one of the seven co-authors of the original 2006 General Assembly Resolution calling for an ATT, Australia was proud to be among the first to sign the Treaty on 3 June. We are

also working to ratify the Treaty as quickly as possible, to do our part towards early entry into force.

Once the Treaty has entered into force we must ensure it is effectively implemented across the different regions of the world. Australia is committed to assisting others to ratify and implement the Treaty and to ultimately strengthen national capacities to regulate the cross-border movement of arms.

This is why Australia has committed \$1 million dollars to initiate the United Nations Trust Facility Supporting Cooperation on Arms Regulation (UNSCAR). We are pleased to be working alongside our UNSCAR partners, the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) and other donors Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom to build this facility. UNSCAR is now receiving proposals, and we encourage all States in a position to do so to contribute to this important new initiative, which will kick-start assistance to countries wishing to ratify the ATT as quickly as possible.

Australia is also pleased to once again be joining the other ATT co-authors (Argentina, Costa Rica, Finland, Japan, Kenya and the United Kingdom) to present a further ATT resolution to the General Assembly in its 68th session. We call on all States to demonstrate their support for the ATT by supporting this resolution, which seeks to build on the strong international momentum behind the Treaty to ensure its earliest entry into force.

Mr Chairman,

In the area of small arms and light weapons, Australia is pleased to have been at the forefront of addressing the specific challenge posed by these weapons to international peace and security. The adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2117 on 26 September complements and builds on the ATT, the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons, and the International Tracing Instrument. It reinforces the UN Security Council's efforts to comprehensively tackle the illicit transfer, destabilising accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons and elaborates practical steps to achieve this.

Mr Chairman,

Australia remains as committed as ever to the effective implementation of the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons and to building on the consensus outcome of the Second Review Conference in 2012. We congratulate Ambassador Tanin of Afghanistan on his appointment as Chair-designate of the Fifth Biennial Meeting of States to consider the implementation of the Programme of Action, and look forward to working closely with him to achieve a successful outcome to the meeting in 2014.

Mr Chairman,

As we all know, explosive remnants of war, which include cluster munitions and landmines, leave a deadly legacy long after the cessation of conflict. Explosive remnants

of war injure and kill indiscriminately, cause damage to infrastructure, hinder humanitarian access, and impede economic and social development.

Australia is committed to realising the aims of the key international instruments which seek to reduce the impact of these weapons, and urges all States, where they have not already done so, to join the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM), Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

Australia is very pleased to have now become a State Party to the Convention on Cluster Munitions and to have participated in this capacity in the Fourth Meeting of States Parties to the Convention just last month in Lusaka, Zambia. We take this opportunity to welcome Zambia's Presidency this year and its efforts towards prioritising the universalisation of the CCM.

Australia has worked assiduously towards enhancing cooperation and assistance under the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. We have now reached our commitment of providing \$100 million to mine action over 4 years - two years ahead of schedule in 2012 - and have continued to support high priority initiatives since bringing our total to \$123 million since 2010.

Australia is also honoured to have served since November 2011 as Chair of the Mine Action Support Group (MASG), which enhances the effectiveness of donor funding through improved coordination and partnerships. We welcome and offer our full support to Japan as the incoming Chair of the MASG in 2014.

In addition, we look forward to further collaboration with States and civil society during the forthcoming Thirteenth Meeting of States Parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, to be held in Geneva in December, and the Third Review Conference to be held in Maputo, Mozambique in June 2014.

Mr Chairman,

Australia remains committed to working with others to address the challenges posed by the destabilising accumulation and misuse of conventional weapons. We must remain focussed on this common goal and ensure that together, we continue to strive for real progress in making this a safer world.

I thank you, Mr Chairman.