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PERMANENT MISSION OF INDIA
TO THE CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT
GENEVA

Statement on Transparency in Armaments

By

Jayant Prasad
Ambassador & Permanent Representative of India
to the Conference on Disarmament

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Mr. President,

Allow me first, on behalf of the Indian delegation, to congratulate you for assuming the Presidency of the Conference at an important moment in its cycle of work – the transition from one session to another – and assure you of my delegation's full cooperation. We would like to take this opportunity to place on record our appreciation for your predecessor, Ambassador Camara of Senegal, for the excellent manner in which he guided the Conference. The structured discussions under his presidency on negative security assurances and comprehensive programme of disarmament were most useful and productive. Also, we would like to warmly welcome in our midst, Ambassador Roberto Garcia Moritan, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Argentina, with whom I worked closely in the Conference two decades ago, and compliment him for his success in guiding the work of the Group of Governmental Experts convened to review the operation of the UN Register of Conventional Arms.

With the structured discussion on transparency in armaments, we would have concluded the process of discussions on all the issues on the agenda of the Conference. While these discussions have helped in distilling the different issues, enabled a better understanding of the priorities and concerns of Member States and imparted productive momentum to the Conference, we hope they would also prove their utility in facilitating consensus on a programme of work, which has been the key objective of this exercise and which remains our principal future task.

Mr. President,

All States have the inherent right to self-defence, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. Consequently, they have the right to acquire arms for their security, including through imports. The right of States to produce arms and engage in the arms trade is well recognised. Measures to enhance transparency in armaments must, therefore, be based on full respect for these rights. Also they should take into account the legitimate security needs of States and the principle of undiminished security at the lowest possible level of armaments.

The measures to promote transparency in armaments at the regional and sub-regional levels should take into account the specific characteristics of the region and strive to enhance the security of States and build confidence among them. Transparency also presupposes a modicum of peaceful intentions and stability; otherwise it may only reveal vulnerability.

As with other confidence-building measures, measures to promote transparency in armaments should be voluntary and mutually agreed upon by all States; only then would they be able to secure the widest possible participation and effectively contribute to the process of confidence-building.

The international community is justifiably concerned over the increasing illicit trade in conventional arms, including small arms and light weapons, which has sustained conflicts between and within States, fuelled global terrorism and is linked to other transnational organized crime, including drug trafficking. Illicit transfer of arms to non-State actors, particularly terrorist groups, has emerged as a major threat to the security of States.

States have long recognized the need for transparency in armaments and generally agree that an enhanced level of transparency in armaments contributes greatly to confidence building and security amongst them and could also help in the detection of arms transferred illegally. As a result, the UN General Assembly called upon all States to give high priority to eradicating illicit arms trafficking in all kinds of military weapons in its Resolution 46/36 H and, ten years later, in 2001, UN Member States agreed on a Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons, aimed at preventing, combating and eradicating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

The establishment of a universal and non-discriminatory Register of Conventional Arms in 1992, following the adoption of Resolution 46/36 L by the General Assembly in the preceding year was an important step forward in promoting transparency in armaments. The Register has enjoyed a relatively high-level of participation. Since 1999, over 100 States have submitted reports each year, with the peak participation by 126 States in 2001. We would like to seek even greater participation in the Register and encourage those States that do not as yet provide annual reports to do so in the future.

The UN Register has evolved through the triennial reviews carried out by Groups of Governmental Experts. Significantly, the GGE that concluded its latest review of the Register last month, in which an expert from India actively participated, recommended that States that wished to do so could report their transfer of small arms and light weapons to the Register on the basis of an optional standardized form. It also recommended lower reporting threshold for warships and submarines.

India has supported the UN Register on Conventional Arms as an important global confidence-building measure and has regularly submitted annual reports on the export and import of conventional arms in the recognized categories. We are committed to strengthening the norms of transparency in conventional armaments and consider the UN Register as part of the wider international effort to promote openness and transparency in military matters.

Transparency in armaments has been understood so far in its limited context of reporting on transfer of conventional arms; in fact, transparency in reporting on defence expenditures can also help build confidence among States. We also believe that there should be adjustments to the categories of arms covered under the Register to make it more relevant to security concerns of States. We had supported the inclusion of MANPADS, as an exception, under the category VII of the Register in 2003, and would have liked greater progress in terms of inclusion of small arms and light weapons within the scope of the Register.

Although transparency is not an end in itself, an increased level of openness and transparency in armaments does enhance confidence, promote stability, help States exercise restraint, ease tensions, and reinforce regional and international peace and security. It is, therefore, useful for the Conference to address this issue, in line with General Assembly resolution 60/226, which invites the Conference on Disarmament to consider continuing its work undertaken in the field of transparency in armaments.

I thank you Mr. President.