



BELGIUM

Seventh Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty

(Geneva, 30 August – 3 September 2021)

General statement

Mr. President,

Let me start by expressing the full support of my delegation to you, Ambassador Gberie, in fulfilling your duties as President of this Seventh Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty. We also want to thank you for your skilful leadership throughout the preparatory process. Your presidency, as that of your predecessor, was marked by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the limitations it brings, but we are very grateful that we still have been able to advance our work through efficient virtual meetings and consultations, and that the Conference itself can take place in a format that allows us to make use of the benefits of both virtual and physical meetings. We also commend the Secretariat for making this possible, and we thank all the office holders for their excellent management of the virtual meetings. Even though we hope to return to the regular set-up of in-person meetings in the next cycle, we should not forget the benefits of virtual elements such as a livestream of meetings for delegates who are not in the room and virtual intersessional consultations.

[Belgium aligns itself fully with the statement made by the Representative of the European Union and would like to add a couple of points of particular national interest.]

Mr President, the most important task of the Conference of States Parties and its subsidiary bodies is to consider issues arising from the interpretation and the application of the Treaty, and to consider and adopt recommendations in that regard. It is therefore important for my delegation that this Conference will generate a number of concrete outcomes concerning significant substantive issues.

One of those concrete outcomes is your own working paper on small arms and light weapons and stockpile management. My delegation very much welcomes this topic as your priority theme for this Conference. Analysis of diversion patterns and tracing requests shows us that the large majority of diverted small arms and light weapons come from governmental stockpiles leakages. On this issue of PSSM, it is interesting to link the work

done here in the ATT framework with other instruments like the UN Programme of Action. The outcome document of the BMS7 that was held at the end of July contains numerous references to safe and secure stockpile management including the need to adopt additional control measures when losses are detected.

In this regard, we would like to mention that Belgium has supported the work of Mines Advisory Group (MAG) in two countries of the Sahel region to build safe arsenals, mark weapons, destroy ammunition, and provide training in arms control and risk education.

On the related topic of diversion, we welcome the draft paper on the diversion risk assessment process, that was prepared in the WGETI sub-group on Article 11. In our opinion, the draft paper provides States with a good overview of the basic elements to consider when assessing the risk of diversion in the different phases of an arms transfer. We look forward to discussing this further during the session on treaty implementation and we will come back with a few more considerations then.

Further on diversion, we regret that we are not able to hold the inaugural meeting of the Diversion Information Exchange Forum ("DIEF") during this Conference, the confidential body that we established at CSP6 to allow States Parties and signatory States to safely share operational information about cases of diversion they detected or prevented. As its Chair, we will present a report on the DIEF during the session on transparency, in which we explain the necessity of postponing the inaugural meeting and the proposed way forward. In any case we will continue our awareness-raising about the DIEF and call on all States Parties and signatory States to make use of the DIEF to share all relevant diversion-related information with other States. In that regard we are also appreciative of the recommendation to use the DIEF, which is formulated in the Argentinian working paper on the role of information exchange in the prevention of diversion.

As a last point regarding concrete outcomes, we want to highlight the draft proposed adjustments to the reporting templates, that were developed in the WGTR. The reporting templates are a crucial assistance tool for States Parties to facilitate the preparation of their compulsory initial and annual reports, but it was clear that they included a number of errors, uncertainties and inconsistencies that needed to be addressed. We are therefore pleased that after three years of discussion, we are ready to finalize our review and to adopt the necessary adjustments. This is important to guarantee the user-friendliness and the quality of reporting. During the session on transparency, we will address this topic in more detail.

Mr President, aside from these positive achievements, we also need to address the two challenges that have remained unresolved for years, namely the broad non-compliance with the reporting obligations of the Treaty on the one hand, and with States' financial obligations on the other hand. Both are highly problematic.

The rate of compliance with the reporting obligations has declined every year since the entry into force of the Treaty, but with only half of States Parties submitting their annual report in 2021, it is now nothing less than dramatic. We will elaborate on this issue during the session on transparency, but we want to already appeal to all non-reporting States to prioritize reporting in the coming year as an affirmation of their continued commitment to the Treaty.

My delegation remains equally concerned about the arrears of many States in paying their financial contributions. In that regard, these States should be aware that the important work that we do in this Conference and that the Secretariat does on a daily basis is in peril if they do not fulfil their financial obligations. We commend and support your work, Mr President, and that of the management committee to address this problem. We hope that the application of financial rule 8 (1) d), as well as the adoption of the draft guidelines concerning financial arrangements with the Secretariat can be the start of a reversal of the problematic trend of States not paying what they owe.

Mr President, on both these proposed outcomes and challenges, there is still work to be done, starting during this CSP. We look forward to the discussions this week and you can be assured of our support.

Thank you.