



BELGIUM

Seventh Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty

(Geneva, 30 August – 3 September 2021)

Agenda Item 8. Transparency and Reporting

My delegation first wants to thank the co-chairs for skilfully advancing the work of this important working group. Further Belgium [aligns itself with the statement presented earlier by the European Union, but] would like to address three items [in our national capacity]: the status of reporting, the review of the reporting templates and the draft mandate for the working group for the CSP8 cycle.

As concerns the **status of reporting**, Belgium fully agrees with the assessment of the co-chairs and supports their recommendations to CSP7. Over the last few years Belgium has systematically expressed its regret over the decline in the number of States Parties that comply with their legal obligation to submit a report about their imports and exports. We have now arrived at the point where half of States Parties don't submit a report and where more than a quarter of those that do report opt to not make their reports public. This is alarming. When the ATT was signed, all States acknowledged that transparency about arms transfers was a key purpose of the Treaty. All States Parties accepted the legal obligation to submit annual reports about their exports and imports. . The reporting requirements are not excessive. States Parties are simply asked to report the quantity or value of systems they have exported, imported or authorized, and their destination or origin.

Co-chairs, we acknowledge that adequate reporting requires resources, good internal coordination and support from the higher levels of government. This is the reason why in the ATT reporting working group, we worked very hard to provide assistance to States that have difficulties to comply with their reporting duties. Many tools are available, and in our view these should be more widely used.

We understand the impact of the covid-19 pandemic over the last 18 months, but the steady decline in reporting rates predates the pandemic. Therefore, we are confronted with a structural - and worsening - problem.

Transparency is a key element of the Treaty. The annual provision of basic information on arms imports and exports ensures insight into how States Parties implement and apply the Treaty. When reporting rates decrease, confidence in the durable commitment to the Treaty's purpose diminishes. Our delegation therefore strongly urges all non-reporting States Parties to demonstrate their commitment to the Treaty and comply with their reporting obligations. If States experience difficulties doing so, they are invited to seek the assistance that is available.

Regarding the **review of the reporting templates**, my delegation wants to thank the co-chairs for successfully taking this important exercise forward and for involving us in the final consultations on the present documents. The review has been on the agenda since CSP5, and we have worked hard to achieve a compromise on a set of amendments that is both thorough and acceptable to those with divergent views about the exercise. We are convinced that everybody now agrees that the present documents are a major improvement in terms of clarity and coherence of the templates and will better

facilitate comprehensive reporting. In that respect we are ready to finally conclude the review and to endorse these documents as a sound basis for States Parties to fulfil their reporting obligations in the years to come.

Concerning the **draft mandate**, Belgium supports the continued attention given to the issue of public availability of reports and the aggregation of data in annual reports. Making reports publicly available and disaggregating data may not be explicit Treaty obligations, but as the 'FAQ'-type guidance document on the annual reporting shows, in making their decisions States Parties need to take into account the Treaty's purpose of transparency in Article 1 and carefully weigh their concerns about public availability and disaggregation against the public interest in transparency. It remains very useful to exchange views in the working group on practices, challenges and limitations in this regard , especially in light of the growing number of States Parties that opt to not make their reports public. Finally, Belgium confirms that it will look at possible steps to facilitate the identification of the conventional arms in Article 2 (1) of the Treaty in the "Harmonized System" of the World Customs Organization.