Statement by

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Minister of State for Trade and Development

at the

Special Event to Mark the Opening for Signature of the Arms Trade Treaty

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Mr President, Secretary General, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It was a great honour to sign the Arms Trade Treaty on behalf of Ireland earlier today, and deeply heartening to see so many countries in attendance, all with a shared commitment to the new Treaty. This is the culmination of a long process which began some seven years ago. As a long-standing advocate of global disarmament and arms control, Ireland strongly supported the goal of an Arms Trade Treaty from the outset.

We have come a long way and we have reached our goal. This is a moment for hope and optimism. The Treaty to which we have committed ourselves today is a strong, robust and comprehensive instrument, with the potential to make a real and lasting difference once it has entered into force. We earnestly hope that this can happen without delay.

Mr President,

The ATT is an important achievement for the UN system and a vindication of our collective way of doing business. Those who doubt the UN’s capacity to deliver on its core mandate of contributing to global peace and security have been given an answer. The UN label confers a unique and unrivalled legitimacy. Ireland has always been an advocate and defender of the United Nations and of multilateralism in general. It is, therefore, gratifying that ours is a UN Treaty - negotiated, adopted and now signed here at UN headquarters.

Ireland worked hard with others to achieve a Treaty which encompasses as many conventional weapons categories as possible; which addresses the hugely damaging phenomenon of arms diversion, responsible for the blighting of so many lives - particularly in the developing world; which recognises the risk of gender-based violence in situations of conflict; and which promotes the highest standards of transparency in national reporting. These elements are all present in the Treaty we have signed today. Furthermore, as a living document, the Treaty can be adapted and improved in the years ahead.

Mr President,
Allow me to highlight just one of the many welcome provisions. For Ireland, ensuring the humanitarian character and purpose of the ATT was fundamental. Strong provisions on human rights and International Humanitarian Law were essential for us. Like other Member States, we interpret Article 6.3 as having the widest scope and application, including war crimes committed both in international and non-international armed conflicts. We take the reference to “other war crimes” as referring, inter alia, to serious violations of Common Article 3 of the 1949 Geneva Conventions as well as to the war crimes defined by the 1977 Additional Protocols and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court for States Parties to those instruments. We believe that the rules of customary international law remain applicable to all States, regardless of this Treaty.

Mr President,

I wish to pay tribute to the role played by civil society in supporting and nurturing the ATT process. Through tireless advocacy work, civil society sensitised our citizens, parliamentarians and ultimately our governments to the need for rigorous, comprehensive, Treaty-based controls for the arms trade. If today is a triumph for the UN and multilateralism, it is also one for NGO activists and the indispensable role which they play.

I would also like to commend Ambassador Peter Woolcott of Australia and his predecessor, Ambassador Roberto Moritan of Argentina, for their skilful stewardship of the ATT negotiating conferences. They laboured long and hard to bring about this Treaty and they deserve our thanks.

Mr President

If it is to make a difference, the ATT must become operational as soon as possible.

For our part, the Government of Ireland will move swiftly to ratify the Treaty. We urge other States to do likewise. If just 50 of us manage to ratify within the next 12 months, this Treaty could enter into force and start saving lives during 2014.
Of course, our goal is a universal Treaty and we will work to encourage as many States as possible to sign and ratify. We hope those who may not be able to commit to the ATT today or tomorrow will be able to do so in the period ahead.

In conclusion, may I say that I consider today’s signing ceremony to be a truly historic occasion and a milestone in global arms control. The international community finally has a legally-binding instrument that will regulate the trade in conventional arms and make a major contribution to international peace and stability. Simply put, if effectively implemented, the ATT will reduce human suffering and save lives. No Treaty could serve a higher purpose.

Thank you