The United Nations Register of Conventional Arms has made good progress over the last ten years of its operation. So far, 162 Governments have participated in the Register one or more times. It is particularly encouraging that there has been a sharp rise in participation in the last two years.

It is auspicious that in its tenth year, the Register has recorded the highest level of participation. Currently, 124 Governments have reported for the latest calendar year 2001 and this figure may rise further in the weeks ahead, as some late submissions are still expected.

It is also encouraging that an increasing number of Governments that have not exported or imported any of the conventional weapons covered by the Register are participating by sending "nil" reports, using the simplified reporting form for this purpose, as recommended by the 2000 Group of Governmental Experts.
Another encouraging sign is that more Governments are using the "remarks" column in the standardized reporting form, thereby enriching the quality of data they provide. A continuation of this trend would do much to strengthen the qualitative value of the Register.

Yet, there is much work to be done to achieve the goal of universal participation and to further strengthen the Register as a transparency instrument. We also need to consider ways of making the operation of this instrument more efficient for, both, the Secretariat and participating States.

Parallel efforts are needed to consolidate the achievements of recent years and, at the same time, to build upon those achievements. Such efforts will require a further strengthening of cooperation between the Secretariat and participating Governments.

Let me touch upon some aspects of that cooperation.

While there has been good progress in the last two years towards the timely submission of annual reports for the Register, more progress needs to be made if we are to substantially reduce the practice of issuing addendums to the consolidated annual report of the Secretary-General. We should strive towards incorporating the maximum number of submissions in the main body of the Secretary-General's annual report.

I would therefore urge participating Governments to do their utmost to meet the 31 May deadline for the submission of their reports. I would also request that, as far as possible, the annual submissions should be transmitted to the Secretariat by electronic means, in addition to the normal practice of sending it in authenticated hard copy. Such improvements would serve the reform proposals aimed at achieving a more efficient Organisation, as set out in Section III of the Secretary-General's report "Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change" (A/57/387).

In those cases where electronic submission proves difficult, I would urge that the data or information transmitted to the Secretariat should be legible, so that there is less chance of error when submissions are reproduced. At present, the need to seek clarification arises frequently and sometimes it consumes considerable amount of time and energy.

A further strengthening of cooperation should also be reflected in establishing an efficient channel of communication between the Secretariat and Governments.

Many Governments have yet to provide the Secretariat with information on their national point of contact. Among the approximately 70 Governments that have done so, some have not given adequate information, or have not periodically updated that information, to enable the Secretariat to establish direct contact with capitals.
I would therefore urge all participating Governments to provide the necessary information to the Department of Disarmament Affairs. As already agreed, such a channel of communication would only be used for official purposes relating to the Register.

Besides facilitating the work of the Secretariat, it would also help to alleviate the pressure of work on the Permanent Missions.

Apart from efforts to achieve universal participation and timely submissions, the Register's continued progress would also require consideration of technical adjustments to the existing seven categories of armaments. Technical adjustments would facilitate greater participation by making the Register more relevant to some sub-regions, where the existing categories, as defined, are less central to their security concerns. Progress in this area would demonstrate that the Register is a dynamic instrument capable of responding and adapting to changing needs and conditions.

As the Secretary-General observed in his statement, marking the tenth anniversary of the Register on 30 August, "if the effectiveness of (the Register) is strengthened further, it can serve as a significant early-warning mechanism, contributing with other instruments to the prevention of conflict and to restraint in arms acquisition". Technical adjustments would contribute towards achieving that goal.

Governmental experts considered the issue of technical adjustments during the Register's review in 2000, but I hope that further discussion during the review next year would yield positive results. In this connection, it would be useful to recall the list of possible equipment that could be considered for inclusion, which was identified by technical experts, as reflected in the report of the Secretary-General of 14 August 1992 (A/47/342).

While transparency in all categories of weapons is vitally needed, progress in one category should not be held hostage until agreement is reached in all categories.

Although the Register is a voluntary reporting instrument, it is my expectation that its continued progress would enable arms transparency to emerge as a global norm, making it an embedded part of international relations.

In this regard, I am particularly heartened by the recent legislation adopted by South Africa, which obligates the Government to report its international arms transfers to the Register of Conventional Arms. I hope this important development will create wider interest in the Southern African region as well as in other regions. It is auspicious that the South African legislation was adopted on the tenth year of the Register.

Finally, I would like to say a few words about the Secretariat's role in facilitating the progress of the Register.
The Department of Disarmament Affairs attaches great importance to the Register as a global arms transparency instrument. Despite resource constraints, we have exerted sustained and intensive efforts towards facilitating higher participation, while at the same time, raising the international profile of the Register through publications and other outreach activities. As in the past, we will provide all the support that may be needed to achieve a productive outcome to the Register's review next year. It is vital that we should now expand the Register after its first decade.

I would also like to highlight the joint endeavour by DDA and a number of interested Governments to encourage greater participation in the Register through regional and sub-regional workshops aimed at working level officials. We greatly appreciate the significant support and assistance we have received from Canada, Germany, Japan and The Netherlands. We intend to continue our excellent cooperation with them, and look forward to working closely with other Governments, as well, that might wish to join this effort. Capacity building, especially in regions where participation in the Register is low, particularly in Africa, is essential in realizing our common task of transparency.

With regard to workshops, I should mention in passing that follow up activities are essential to maximize the results of workshops and DDA would like to work closely with interested Governments on post-workshop activities.

As the tenth year of the Register draws to a close, I think it can be said that the Register of Conventional Arms has made promising progress in the first decade of its operation, demonstrating wide international support, and good future prospects.

I would like to encourage the academic and research community to analyse the raw data in the Register so that the international community can benefit from their findings. I also urge the media and civil society, and especially disarmament NGOs, to assist the aims of the Register.

May I conclude by reiterating the assurances of the Secretary-General, made in his statement of 30 August 2002, that the Secretariat will continue to do all it can to facilitate and foster the continued progress of the Register.