OPENING REMARKS

By

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Side Event:
Arms Transfers, Transparency, and the ATT

Hosted by the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, and the Permanent Missions of Sweden and Germany

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Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to the United Nations and to thank you for joining us at this Special Event on “Arms Transfers, Transparency, and the ATT”. I thank the Permanent Mission of Germany, the Permanent Mission of Sweden, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) for co-sponsoring this event with us and for making it possible.

The timing could not be better, as the event coincides with the start of the two-week Final Conference to negotiate the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). This treaty has the important goal of establishing the highest possible common standards for regulating the international trade in conventional arms. Regulation will help prevent the misuse of conventional arms and their diversion to illicit markets.

Another pillar of the proposed ATT is the promotion of transparency in the conventional arms trade, which is essential for building confidence among States.

For today’s event, we have gathered together some of the foremost experts in the area of transparency in arms transfers to discuss this particular element of the ATT.

Transparency will certainly be a critical factor in ensuring the successful implementation of the treaty. It is a key concept that allows the ATT to become more than a set of obligations written on paper—it actually affects States’ behaviour.

Firstly, transparency will allow governments, researchers, journalists and others to assess the implementation of ATT obligations.

Secondly, it will stimulate public interest and scrutiny on the issue, which in turn would help enhance democratic accountability by States in their arms transfers. As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon once put it, “Without real transparency, there can be no real accountability.”

And thirdly, enhanced transparency will serve a confidence-building function. When it comes to the classic UN goals of regulating armaments and disarmament, trouble begins when transparency ends. This is why we have worked for so many years to seek improvements in this area.

The UN Register of Conventional Arms—which the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs has maintained for over 20 years—offers a good case in point. Every year, UN Member States voluntarily provide reports to the Register on their imports and exports of conventional weapons. The data provided in those reports—
supplemented by interactive UN Register web platform we launched in 2011—provide a foundation for ongoing UN efforts to enhance transparency in this field.

I want to underscore, however, that the UN does not operate in a vacuum when it comes to information on the arms trade. We have maintained close contacts with academia and research institutes in civil society. This is why I find it especially fitting and appropriate that an updated version of SIPRI’s Arms Transfers Database will be launched here today. We are meeting on common ground, and working for a great common cause.

The working relationship between the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs and SIPRI goes back many years. Our many shared interests and joint expertise have naturally led us to deepen our collaboration and I expect this to continue. The databases maintained by UNODA and SIPRI, including in the area of arms transparency, have undoubtedly contributed to each other’s research and work.

So as negotiators prepare to commence their work at this Final Conference on the ATT, I hope your discussions will help to strengthen further the case for strong transparency paragraphs in the proposed Treaty, including reporting on both exports and imports.

With these brief remarks, I wish to commend you all for your many past and ongoing efforts to strengthen transparency in our all-too opaque world.