

Conference on Disarmament Plenary Meeting on Transparency in Armaments
Statement by Ms Fiona Paterson, Charge d'Affaires
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Transparency in Armaments

Mr President,

As this is the first time that my delegation takes the floor under your Presidency of the CD, allow me to congratulate you on the assumption of your responsibilities and to assure you of my delegation's continuing support and participation.

Allow me also to thank Vice Minister Garcia Moritan for his excellent chairmanship of the GGE to the UN Register of Conventional Arms and for updating the conference directly about the Group's progress. We hope this practice can be continued after the conclusion of future GGE meetings since it will greatly help us in our work on transparency.

Mr President

The United Kingdom would like to make a short statement at this session on Transparency in Armaments, on the importance of effective control on the availability of Man-Portable Air Defence Systems (MANPADS).

MANPADS present a particular threat if allowed to fall into the hands of undesirable end users. They are small, light, easily transportable, and easy to conceal. Training is needed to use them. Yet terrorist groups possess these systems and have used them to target both military and civilian aircraft. Terrorists continue to seek to gain access to ever more sophisticated systems. And as long as there is leakage from existing stockpiles and diversion from the legitimate trade in these arms, terrorists will continue to acquire and use them.

The international community has begun making steady progress toward more effective control of these systems. In 2003 the Wassenaar Arrangement agreed the "Elements for Export Controls of Man-Portable Air Defence Systems". These "Elements" set out trading standards in a clear and usable way. They address key issues, including the need to only allow the transfer of MANPADS to "foreign governments or to agents specifically authorised to act on behalf of a government"; and the need to ensure that proposed recipients have the capacity to properly ensure secure handling without diversion.

The Wassenaar "Elements" contain clear provisions for the sharing of information on:

- potential receiving governments that are proven to fail to meet the necessary standards in export control guarantees and practices, and

- non-state entities that are or may be attempting to acquire MANPADS.

And they highlight the urgent need to ensure MANPADS are properly stored.

The Elements are now seen as the key document, or the “gold standard”. Similar practices have now been adopted by an increasing number of regional groupings. It is vital that we fully implement these standards – putting the need to ensure proper control of MANPADS above commercial considerations.

Mr President

Out of a desire to support in a practical fashion the Wassenaar Elements, the United Kingdom has this year been working to further develop storage best practice. As a result of our work, the OSCE agreed to issue in March this year detailed guidance on “National Procedures for Stockpile Management and Security of Man-Portable Air Defence Systems” as an Annex to the OSCE “Handbook of Best Practice on Small Arms and Light Weapons”. I commend this guidance to all of you. If these arms are not stored properly, however stringent our export control systems, leakage will continue.

Before I conclude, I should like to express the UK’s appreciation for the work which Australia has conducted via their MANPADS initiative, both here in Geneva during the valuable seminar they arranged in June, and in support of the outreach efforts they are undertaking as the Chair of the Wassenaar Arrangement. The importance we attach to this work is endorsed at the highest level. At a Meeting in Australia in March our Prime Ministers agreed “that the UK will actively support Australian efforts to encourage wider international implementation of effective controls over the manufacture, storage and transfer of Man Portable Air Defence Systems (MANPADS), including to prevent them being sold to non-state entities”.

The UK would like to call on all members of the CD to support ongoing work to spread, and effectively implement, the highest standards of control over these systems.

Mr President

Similarly also, before concluding I would like to draw the attention of the Conference to other efforts in the field of Transparency in Armaments – that of the move towards an Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) within the UN framework. Seven countries – Argentina, Australia, Costa Rica, Finland, Japan, Kenya, UK – have circulated a draft resolution on an ATT which we intend to table at the forthcoming First Committee of the UN General Assembly this October. We hope that your authorities will be able to support this important initiative.

I thank you.