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GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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OPENING FOR SIGNATURE OF THE ARMS TRADE TREATY

Statement by The Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM MP Minister for Defence Materiel

Mr Secretary-General, Your Excellencies,

This is a historic day for the United Nations and the international community.

Australia is very pleased to be amongst the first countries to sign this Treaty, in view of our steadfast and long-standing support for its successful conclusion.

That so many countries voted in favour of the Arms Trade Treaty resolution on 2 April - opposed only by Iran, Syria and DPRK - and that so many signed today, is a clear demonstration of the strength of international sentiment on the need for such a treaty.

For Australia, as with the other co-author countries and the many other supporters of the ATT, this represents the culmination of years of effort to address the security, social, economic and humanitarian consequences of the illicit and unregulated trade in conventional arms.

The effect of illicit and unregulated trade in conventional arms cannot be understated.

This trade has fuelled conflicts and often affects the poorest and most vulnerable communities, including women and children.

As we have heard before – but it bears repeating today – some half a million people are killed each year because of the unregulated flow of small arms. And we know there are already an estimated 875 million small arms in circulation.

In the first five months of our current term as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, we have seen all too clearly the impact of these weapons as drivers of instability, conflict and violence – and the enormous toll on human life.

Might I also say as a former soldier, having personally witnessed this devastation many times, that I have felt the spirit of the victims with us here today in this Chamber guiding our work, as indeed is the spirit of the service men and women, NGOs and UN personnel who have worked so hard to end such suffering.

It is that devastation and impact on human lives that is a key motivator for Australia. That is why we have supported the Treaty's establishment of common international humanitarian standards for regulating international transfers of conventional arms.

It is now for us to maintain momentum behind this Treaty, and to focus attention on its earliest possible entry into force.

Adoption of the Treaty and its opening for signature today, although historic and a significant milestone, is not an end in itself. This represents a step along the way. Our work is only just beginning.

The effective implementation of the Treaty will be key to preventing the diversion of arms to illicit markets and to addressing those humanitarian concerns that began our journey around seven years ago.

An important requirement will be to facilitate the capacity-building and other support necessary for this Treaty to make a real difference, including to the lives of so many affected by the unregulated, illicit and irresponsible trade in conventional arms.

This Treaty is enormously important all across the regions of the world and we have worked with partners including in the Asia-Pacific, Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America to ensure that the Treaty is able to address the challenges we all face. It is particularly significant for the security of Australia's region, as Pacific Island countries are vulnerable to the spread of even relatively small quantities of arms and ammunition.

This is why Australia, for its part, has now focussed on a practical way to assist with the entry into force and effective implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty.

My ministerial colleague, Senator Carr, Australia's Foreign Minister, committed \$1 million to assist this effort and we have been working closely with the United Nations, Germany and others to establish a United Nations multilateral assistance fund to provide early assistance to countries preparing to ratify and implement the Treaty.

We encourage others to join this important initiative, in order to give practical effect to this historic Treaty.

We look forward to continuing to work closely with the international community and civil society and to building on our commitment today to the effective implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty.

Thank you.