Statement by Ambassador Masood Khan - Thematic Debate in the First Committee on Conventional Weapons (October 14, 2005)

Mr. Chairman,

In my intervention, I will touch on the subjects of conventional weapons, CCW, ERW, mines other than anti-personnel mines, and small arms and light weapons.

Conventional Arms

At the beginning of the First Committee session, Undersecretary Nabouyasu Abe cautioned us that the preponderant focus on the WMD threat should not lessen our attention to the matters relating to regulation and reduction of conventional arms and armed forces. We agree.

But this is precisely what is happening. Conventional weapons and armaments and the global trade in them are becoming something of a blind spot of the international community.

While international attention is focused on the need to control weapons of mass destruction, and rightly so, the trade in conventional weapons continues to flourish in a legal and moral vacuum. After an initial decline in the outlays on conventional weapons in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, in the recent years we have seen a surge in expenditures and a build up of conventional armaments and armed forces.

Conventional weapons are used in scores of conflicts raging in different parts of the world. Conventional arms include small arms and light weapons, which no doubt have a destabilizing impact. However, overemphasis on small and light weapons and a disproportionate focus on them tend to eclipse the salience of sophisticated conventional weapons and technology being traded in huge quantities around the globe.

The Final Document of the First Special Session of the General Assembly on Disarmament (SSOD I) characterized the global military expenditure in 1978 as a “colossal waste of resources” and called for not only reduction in such spending, but for the reinvestment of resources into efforts to fight poverty and improve human conditions.

By that yardstick, cumulatively, global trends in military expenditures worldwide are both staggering and alarming. In 2004, the total military spending rose to $ 1.035 trillion, at current prices. The total budget of the United Nations, mandated to maintain international peace and security, is less than 1.5 % of world’s military expenditure.

The total value of arms transfer agreements in 2004 has been estimated at $ 37 billion, a significant increase over 2003.

In 2004, the value of all arms transfer agreements with developing nations was nearly $ 21.8 billion, an increase over $ 15. 1 billion total in 2003.

The total value of international arms transfer agreements, during the period 2001 to 2004, was $ 131. 2 billion. During this period, developing countries accounted for 63.2 % of all international arms deliveries.

The third world countries are the “favored” destination for arms sales. New markets are being explored, created and sought after.

Globalized arms production and sales ignore the grave humanitarian, political and strategic consequences of conventional weapons proliferation.
Arms sellers often encourage both sides in a conflict to buy more weapons. The only question asked is who has the money. The result is a series of regional arms races mostly in volatile parts of the world. In fact, arms vendors from different countries compete for a bigger slice of a country’s growing defense budget and propel it. Some of them see conflict situations as a “unique selling opportunity”. While trying to facilitate talks to ease tensions, senior officials of the selling nations have used such occasions to lobby for sale of sophisticated military equipment produced by their national manufacturers. These officials market their weapons, even as they seek to mediate peace.

On the other hand, the demand for weapons emanates from either insecurity or ambition. Some states are seeking to build up their national armed forces on land, in the air, and at the sea, with the declared objective of emerging as a global power, often with the self-proclaimed intent to dominate their own region. Other states affected by the imbalance are then obliged to acquire weapons to ensure a minimum capability to deter aggression and domination. The build up of such massive arms acquisitions not only diverts resources from the desperate requirements of development and poverty alleviation, but also contributes to instability and insecurity at the regional and global levels.

In view of these disturbing trends, it is imperative that we pursue conventional arms control, at the lowest possible levels of armaments and military forces, in order to promote regional and international peace and security. We believe that the preservation of a balance in the defense capabilities of states at the lowest levels or armaments should be the prime objective of conventional arms control.

I would like to recall the definitive and authoritative direction given by SSOD-I: “Together with negotiations on nuclear disarmament measures, negotiations should be carried out on the balanced reduction of forces and of conventional armaments, based on the principle of undiminished security of the parties with a view to promoting or enhancing stability at a lower military level, taking into account the need of all states to protect their security”.

Conventional arms control needs to be pursued primarily in the regional and subregional contexts since most threats to peace and security arise mainly in states located in the same region or sub-region.

In this regard, we can adapt and follow good practices. The value of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, a cornerstone of European security, cannot be underestimated. States with larger military capabilities have a special responsibility in promoting such agreements for regional security.

We must step up efforts to curb excessive and destabilizing accumulation of conventional weapons as well as their uncontrolled transfers.

Conventional arms control must (a) address the root causes of insecurity, emanating from disputes, conflicts and threat perceptions and (b) seek to promote balance among regional states. We need to follow up such affirmations with concrete action:

Firstly, the Department of Disarmament Affairs can analyze the data on arms transfers and help states develop benchmarks for conventional arms control at regional and subregional levels.

In 2002, at the tenth anniversary of the UN Arms Register, Secretary General Kofi Annan said that “if the effectiveness of this tool 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”. This assessment remains valid.
Secondly, the Conference on Disarmament can consider formulation of the principles that can serve as a framework for regional agreements on conventional arms control.

A stable balance of conventional forces is necessary to ensure strategic stability, particularly in the regions riven with tensions. Massive induction of sophisticated weaponry accentuates conventional asymmetries and compels greater reliance on nuclear and missile deterrence in the regions that have such capabilities.

In South Asia, we are pursuing a Strategic Restraint Regime, which has three constituents: nuclear and missile restraint; conventional balance; and conflict resolution. Even as we sustain confidence building and composite dialogue to address outstanding issues and work towards strategic stability and nuclear risk reduction, we will continue to strive for a conventional balance at the lowest possible level of armaments. In the interest of peace and security in South Asia, there must be restraint both in the demand and the supply of conventional weapons.

CCW

Pakistan is fully committed to the faithful implementation of the Convention on Certain Weapons and the protocols added to it. The delicate balance in these instruments – to minimize the human suffering without sacrificing the legitimate security interests of states – must be maintained.

ERW

The Protocol on the Explosive Remnants of War (ERW), though not perfect, is a significant step in the field of international humanitarian law (IHL). Its real value will be judged by its faithful implementation. Therefore, instead of discussing its further refinements or modifications, the focus should be on the Protocol's entry into force and implementation. Pakistan’s armed forces are being trained and sensitized at all levels to the IHL principles of humanity, discrimination, proportionality, and superfluous injury. Legal advisers are associated with the planning at the strategic, operational and tactical levels.

MOTAPM/AVMs

This August, extensive discussions on anti-vehicle mines were held by the Group of Government Experts (GGE). Divergences remain. We are of the view that the CCW and its five protocols adequately address humanitarian aspects of mines, including AVMs. AVM are defensive weapons meant to deter aggression and to avert war. Thus, they can contribute to stability in a conflict situation. In our case, empirical evidence gathered over the past fifty five years has established that AVMs have not caused civilian or military casualties. Further discussions on MOTAPM should focus on the questions of varied requirements, national capacities, and illicit transfers to non-state actors. We banned export of mines in 1999.

SALW

The UN Programme of Action (PoA) on Small Arms and Light Weapons has worked out a balance between humanitarian concerns and the legitimate security needs of States and rightly focuses on the “illicit trade”. This balance and focus must be maintained.

Member States have achieved considerable progress in implementing the PoA nationally, regionally and at international levels. The recent conclusion of the Marking and Tracing Instrument was an important step forward in furthering the objectives of UNPoA. The next important issue is illicit brokering which should be taken up by a Group of Governmental Experts in pursuance of the UNGA resolution.
We look forward to actively participating in the next year’s Review Conference, which we hope will maintain the spirit of consensus that has characterized the discussions and negotiations on various aspects of the small arms and light weapons.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman