

UK Opening Statement at the Diplomatic Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty

Thank you, Mr Chairman.

I apologise that Minister Burt, who was unable to deliver his statement on Monday, cannot be here. But he is watching over our progress. We enjoy great cross-party support, and support from our civil society and defence industry in the UK, as well as many in the general UK public.

I would like to begin by congratulating you on your appointment as Chair of the Diplomatic Conference and assure you of the UK's full support over the next four weeks.

It is a pleasure to be able to add my voice to the important interventions we have already heard this morning about the importance of this Conference, and what it is trying to achieve. And the United Kingdom aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union.

Mr Chairman,

It is an over-used phrase but this really is a historic moment. It is one the UK has championed since we and our fellow co-authors tabled the initial UN Resolution on the Arms Trade Treaty in 2006. The support of the overwhelming majority of states, together with the active engagement of civil society and of the legitimate defence industry has brought us, under your skilful leadership, to this critical point.

For far too long the international trade in conventional arms has lacked proper and coherent regulation. This has fuelled conflict, undermined security and diverted resources from development. Millions of lives have been, and continue to be, blighted. The security and humanitarian effects of this are all too clear. The time to act is now.

Now is the time for us to fulfil our responsibility. In the four short weeks ahead, we must establish agreement on a robust and effective, legally binding Arms Trade Treaty.

Mr Chairman,

It is right that this negotiation is being undertaken within the framework of the United Nations. Not only because the Treaty requires global coverage to be fully effective. But also because our work on the Arms Trade Treaty is guided by the principles of the UN Charter. This Charter provides the foundation upon which our efforts are built and it is crucial that the UN arms control and disarmament machinery delivers an effective Treaty.

Article One of the Charter highlights the very purpose of the United Nations. An effective Arms Trade Treaty, with the highest possible standards and the widest participation of states, will directly support that purpose. Such a Treaty will directly help to maintain international peace and security, whilst encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It is the Charter that provides the mandate for our actions and the guidance for our endeavours.

Mr Chairman,

The Arms Trade Treaty has the potential to bring real and significant benefits to all UN Member States. Over the next four weeks, it will be important that we listen to each other, approaching the negotiations with determination and mutual respect. We have a responsibility to our citizens to ensure we reach an agreement that fully meets their needs and ambitions, and makes a meaningful difference to millions of lives.

I like to make some personal comments and refer to the loss of the UN international civil servants, who perished in Baghdad in August 2003. Those people, from Brazil, from Egypt, from my country, were taken from us through conflict. Let us lift our vision outside of this room, beyond Rules of Procedure, to focus on what we will do to change the situation once we leave the room. We should negotiate as though implementation matters.

Thank you.