



Final Session of the Group of Governmental Experts on “Problems arising from the accumulation of conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus”

**Remarks by Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu
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Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished members of the GGE,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to be with you today at the opening meeting of the third and final session of the Group of Governmental Experts on “Problems arising from the accumulation of conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus,” established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 72/55.

As you enter your final stages of work, allow me to commend Chairman Marcus Bleinroth and all the GGE members on the tremendous progress made, despite the ongoing public health challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The delays caused by the global health crisis have certainly not hindered the Group’s ability to carry out its mandate. In this regard, I thank the experts for the tremendous flexibility shown in ensuring the Group completes its work in a timely fashion. I know it has not been easy to work under these conditions.

In recent decades, multilateral efforts to address the small arms issue, and related processes at the United Nations, have had a considerable impact on discussions on conventional ammunition.

We are all well-acquainted with the deep divergence of views related to inclusion of ammunition in the framework of the UN Programme of Action.

An unfortunate by-product of this ongoing divergence of views has been that multilateral discussions on other categories of conventional ammunition, specifically those associated with the seven major categories of conventional weapons covered under the Register of Conventional Arms, have been limited.

While expert-level discussions on ammunition and explosives took place in the 1990s, focus remained largely on small arm and light weapons ammunition, rather than on conventional ammunition more broadly.¹

It is true that some progress has been made, such as the inclusion of all types of ammunition in the scope of the Arms Trade Treaty.

Nonetheless, the safety and security challenges posed by conventional ammunition continue to lack sufficient attention at the global level—particularly as a standalone issue of concern.

All conventional ammunition, most especially materiel for use in heavy weapons, pose a serious explosive risk to civilian populations, infrastructure and the environment, while also representing a diversion threat to unauthorized users, including criminal and terrorist groups. The explosive nature of ammunition makes this materiel especially attractive for the manufacture of improvised explosive devices by non-state actors.

The very recent explosions that occurred at a military facility in Bata, Equatorial Guinea in March 2021, which resulted in over 100 deaths and 600 injuries, is a reminder of the humanitarian, environmental and financial devastation that can arise from poorly managed ammunition.

Thus, the need to raise the profile of all categories of conventional ammunition as an issue of standalone concern is as urgent as ever.

There have been some important strides made to this end—from the development of the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines to the establishment of the UN SaferGuard Programme as the corresponding knowledge management platform under United Nations auspices.

These developments were a direct result of the recommendations of your predecessor GGE convened in 2008.

Furthermore, international cooperation and assistance in this area is expanding and resources are growing as more States are recognizing the critical importance of securing their ammunition stockpiles.

But despite this progress, conventional ammunition continues to be referred to as the “orphan” of conventional arms control. It is an issue that although present in a certain number of international and regional instruments, its treatment is fragmented and limited in scope.

Building on the work of the 2008 GGE, you have endeavored to comprehensively tackled conventional ammunition across the life-cycle, thus ensuring success beyond what was achieved in the previous Group.

As this Group has rightly concluded, the safety and security challenging arising from conventional ammunition are not limited to national stockpiles, but rather extend throughout the life-cycle from the point of manufacture until disposal or use.

Thus, the challenge of conventional ammunition is not just a question of stockpile management, but rather one that also addresses safety and security along the supply-chain.

It is this comprehensive approach that has laid the groundwork for concrete progress to be made.

I understand the Group's draft report is in a very mature state as a result of dedicated, continuous work since the Group's initial meeting in January 2020.

As such, the Group is well-placed to provide forward-looking, substantive recommendations to the General Assembly that address both the safety and security aspects of conventional ammunition.

I am especially encouraged by the discussions on a multilayer, comprehensive framework that can support the prevention of unplanned explosions as well as diversion at the national, subregional, regional and global levels.

We are presented here with a great opportunity to bring conventional ammunition to the fore—to provide the broader United Nations membership with concrete steps forward to comprehensively address this issue.

I am confident this opportunity will be fully seized.

I wish you all the best with your deliberations and assure you of the full support of my Office.

I thank you.