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General and complete disarmament: transparency in armaments

United Nations Register of Conventional Arms

Report of the Secretary-General

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* A/54/150.

I. Introduction

1. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 46/36 L of 9 December 1991 on transparency in armaments, the Secretary-General, on 1 January 1992, established the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms. In that resolution, the General Assembly called upon all Member States to provide annually data on imports and exports of conventional arms in the seven categories covered under the Register. It also invited Member States, pending the expansion of the Register, to provide to the Secretary-General, with their annual report on imports and exports of arms, available background information regarding their military holdings, procurement through national production and relevant policies, and requested the Secretary-General to record that material and to make it available for consultation by Member States at their request.

2. At its forty-seventh session, the General Assembly, by its resolution 47/52 L of 12 December 1992 on transparency in armaments, called upon all Member States to provide the requested data and information to the Secretary-General by 30 April annually, beginning in 1993, and encouraged Member States to inform the Secretary-General of their national arms import and export policies, legislation and administrative procedures, as regards both the authorization of arms transfers and the prevention of illicit transfers, in conformity with paragraph 18 of its resolution 46/36 L. In subsequent resolutions, the General Assembly reiterated this request.¹

3. Pursuant to requests by the General Assembly,² the Secretary-General, with the assistance of a group of governmental experts in 1994 and 1997, respectively, prepared reports on the continuing operation of the Register and its further development. The reports were submitted to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth and fifty-second sessions (A/49/316; and A/52/316).

4. By resolution 49/75 C and subsequent resolutions,³ the General Assembly decided to keep the scope of and participation in the Register under review, and to that end requested Member States to provide the Secretary-General with their views on the continuing operation of the Register and its further development and on transparency measures related to weapons of mass destruction. The views of Member States were contained in reports of the Secretary-General on the subject (A/50/276 and Add.1; A/51/300 and Add.1-5; A/52/312 and Corr.1 and 2 and Add.1-4; and A/53/334 and Corr.1 and 2 and Add.1 and 2).

5. At its fifty-third session, the General Assembly, by its resolution 53/77 V of 4 December 1998, called upon Member States, with a view to achieving universal participation, to provide the Secretary-General by 31 May annually with the requested data and information for the Register, including nil reports if appropriate, on the basis of resolutions 46/36 L and 47/52 L and the recommendations contained in the 1997 report of the Secretary-General on the continuing operation of the Register and its further development (A/52/316). In addition, the General Assembly invited Member States in a position to do so, pending further development of the Register, to provide additional information on procurement from national production and military holdings, and to make use of the "Remarks" column in the standardized reporting form to provide additional information, such as types or models.

¹ Resolutions 48/75 E of 16 December 1993, 49/75 C of 15 December 1994, 50/70 D of 12 December 1995 and 51/45 H of 10 December 1996 and 52/38 R of 9 December 1997.

² Resolutions 47/52 L, 48/75 E, 49/75 C, 50/70 D and 51/45 H.

³ Resolutions 50/70 D, 51/45 H and 52/38 R.

6. By the same resolution, the General Assembly decided, with a view to further development of the Register, to keep the scope of and participation in the Register under review, and to that end requested Member States to provide the Secretary-General with their views on the continuing operation of the Register and its further development and on transparency measures related to weapons of mass destruction. In accordance with paragraph 4 (a) of the resolution, the Secretary-General has received views from Germany (on behalf of the European Union) and Saudi Arabia. The views are contained in annex I to the present report.

7. At the same session, the General Assembly, by its resolution 53/77 S of 4 December 1998, urged Member States to submit their views to the Secretary-General concerning the following matters with a view to their consideration by the Group of Governmental Experts, which is to be convened in the year 2000:

(a) The early expansion of the scope of the Register;

(b) The elaboration of practical means for the further development of the Register in order to increase transparency related to weapons of mass destruction, in particular nuclear weapons, and to transfers of equipment and technology directly related to the development and manufacture of such weapons.

8. In accordance with paragraph 3 of resolution 53/77 S, the Secretary-General has received views from Cuba, Japan and the United States of America. The views are contained in annex II to the present report.

9. The present report is the seventh consolidated report issued by the Secretary-General since the establishment of the Register.⁴ It contains data and information provided by 68 Governments⁵ on imports and exports of conventional arms covered under the Register — battle tanks, armoured combat vehicles, large-calibre artillery systems, attack helicopters, combat aircraft, warships, missiles and missile launchers — for the calendar year 1998. The report includes additional information provided by Governments on procurement from national production and military holdings. The replies received are contained in sections II and IV below. Any additional replies received from Governments will be issued as addenda to the present report.

10. Section III of the present report contains an index of the background information submitted by Governments in accordance with paragraphs 10 and 18 of General Assembly resolution 46/36 L and paragraph 5 of resolution 47/52 L. The background information is available for consultation at the Department for Disarmament Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat.

⁴ The first to sixth reports were issued under the symbols A/48/344 and Corr.1-3 and Add.1-3; A/49/352 and Corr.1 and 2 and Add.1-4; A/50/547 and Corr.1 and Add.1-4; A/51/300 and Add.1-5; A/52/312 and Corr.1 and 2 and Add.1-4; and A/53/334 and Corr.1 and 2 and Add.1 and 2.

⁵ Including “nil” reports submitted by Cook Islands and Niue.

II. Information received from Governments⁶

11. Information received from Governments is presented in the present section of the report as follows: (a) a complete table listing all the replies received by the Secretary-General, and (b) individual replies of Governments. Where appropriate, the relevant parts of notes verbales are also reproduced.

12. The composite table is provided for ease of reference. As regards the information contained in the table, it should be noted that a "yes" denotes a submission of data regarding imports and/or exports in relation to the seven categories of arms covered by the Register, during the reporting period. For the purpose of uniform tabulation, responses by Governments that contained either "nil", "none", "0", a dash (-), or which otherwise indicated that no exports and/or imports in the categories covered by the Register had taken place, are reflected in the tables as "nil" reports. A blank space under data on imports and/or exports in the composite table indicates that no information was provided. In some cases, however, an explanation can be found in the note verbale of the country in question, as indicated above. Only those parts of the standardized forms which contain specific data and notes verbales of Governments providing relevant information are reproduced in part B of this section. Replies in standardized forms or in notes verbales containing "nil" or blank reports are listed in the composite table only.



⁶ The documents have been reproduced as received. The designations employed do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory or area, or of its authorities.

The United States considers that its transfers of military equipment occur at the time ownership title for the equipment is transferred between the United States and another country. The 1999 submission therefore includes equipment whose title was transferred during the 1998 calendar year.

The national point of contact for information related to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms is the Office of International Security Negotiations, Bureau of Arms Control, United States Department of State. The phone number for this office is 202-647-7909 and the fax number is 202-647-8746.

Annex I

Views received from Governments in accordance with paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 (a) of General Assembly resolution A/53/77 V

Germany

[Original: English]
[26 May 1999]

European Union: common reply concerning General Assembly resolution 53/77 V on transparency in armaments

The member States of the European Union have supported General Assembly resolution 53/77 V on transparency in armaments. They wish to provide the following common reply. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, the associated country Cyprus and the European Free Trade Area countries members of the European Economic Area, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway align themselves with this reply.

In its resolution 53/77 V, the General Assembly calls upon Member States of the United Nations to provide the Secretary-General with their views on the continuing operation of the Register and its further development and on transparency measures related to weapons of mass destruction.

Transparency in armaments is an important concept for building confidence and security between States. The Register of Conventional Arms is an important and concrete measure in this respect.

The Register provides data on international arms transfers of those categories of conventional arms which are potentially destabilizing when accumulated excessively. It serves to enhance transparency, build confidence and promote better understanding among states. The European Union member States believe that every effort should be made to secure the widest possible participation in the Register and improve its effectiveness.

All Member States of the United Nations are encouraged to submit data to the Register, including "nil" reports. The member States of the European Union furthermore believe that inclusion of data on military holdings and procurement through national production make the Register more complete.

The member States of the European Union welcome all efforts to further strengthen the role of the Register in the field of conventional arms control, and hope that the Group of Governmental Experts, which will be convened in 2000, will agree on effective ways in which to achieve this. They find the work of the Conference of Disarmament in the field of Transparency in Armaments of continuing value, and hope that agreement can be reached on a mandate for an ad hoc committee to study possible further transparency measures and ways in which the Register can be strengthened.

The member States of the European Union would point out, however, that efforts in the field of conventional arms should be made separately from those aimed at increased transparency in the field of weapons of mass destruction. The member States of the European Union therefore regret the adoption of resolution 53/77 S on transparency in armaments,

which unequivocally links transparency measures in the field of weapons of mass destruction to the Register of Conventional Arms.

Transparency measures in the field of weapons of mass destruction are important, and the continued discussion of such measures points to the need to find appropriate ways and means to enhance transparency. The key, however, to success in increased transparency both of conventional arms and of weapons of mass destruction lies in the separate development of measures, each in its appropriate forum. If such a distinction is not made, the viability of the Register would be affected and increased participation and transparency jeopardized. The member States of the European Union for their part will continue to participate actively in all appropriate forums to discuss transparency measures which can contribute to increased confidence and greater security among all Member States of the United Nations.

The member States of the European Union are committed to the effective functioning of the Register and its further development, and call upon all Member States of the United Nations to provide the data and information requested.

Saudi Arabia

[Original: Arabic]
[28 April 1999]

With regard to paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 (a) of resolution 53/77 V, the Government of Saudi Arabia wishes to make the following comments.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reaffirms the reply of States members of the League of Arab States as reproduced in the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, under the item “General and complete disarmament: transparency in armaments”, contained in document A/52/312 of 28 August 1997.

Annex II

Views received from Governments in accordance with paragraph 3 of General Assembly resolution A/53/77 S

Cuba

[Original: Spanish]

[27 May 1999]

With the adoption of its resolution 46/36 L of 6 December 1991, the General Assembly decided to promote the objectives of openness and transparency with regard to armaments. The United Nations Register of Conventional Arms is an important contribution towards the achievement of those objectives. In the years since then, Cuba has been providing data for the Register of Conventional Arms.

Clearly, for security reasons, some States maintain a degree of reserve with regard to their present and future military capabilities, and when they procure arms they always require their suppliers to keep the arms transfer negotiations and transactions confidential.

However, if greater transparency existed in these types of operations, the level of distrust among States could be reduced, regional and international tensions alleviated and timely information provided about trends in the field of transparency in armaments.

The current situation with respect to military spending remains a matter of concern. According to expert sources, US\$ 780 billion a year are being spent on maintaining armies and acquiring new weapons. This means that US\$ 2.1 billion a day are being spent on such activities.

The arms trade is expanding mainly through exports from the industrialized countries. In 1997, for example, the international arms trade grew by 12 per cent. Arms sales from the United States of America, which is still the leading country in such sales, increased from US\$ 14.2 billion in 1992, or 39.5 per cent of the world total, to US\$ 17 billion in 1996.

All these data serve to justify the important role which the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms can play in building confidence, which will help to eliminate existing stocks of defence weapons among States.

Cuba is aware that transparency is not an end in itself but a means of enhancing security; it should be seen in the context of a series of measures leading to general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.

Transparency in armaments should be seen as a means of building universal, non-discriminatory confidence, and should therefore include all types of arms. The Register should cover additional categories of arms, such as sophisticated conventional arms and weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons.

In Cuba's view, the Register should be expanded to include the following elements:

1. Information on the temporary or indefinite presence in a State's territory of technologies and equipment covered by the Register which belongs to other States. A reasonable time limit should be set within which States must provide this information to the United Nations.

2. Data on the value of arms exports by supplier States, specifying the quantities and value by weapon system.

3. Information on the production of weapons by type and system, research and development activities for introducing new types of weapons or modernizing existing ones, and transfers of high technology with military applications, among other important data.

4. Information on production, stockpiling, export, import, transfer of military technology, research and development activities by States and other data related to all types of nuclear weapons.

This information would include data from any operation relating to possible donations, grants and even temporary transfers of this type of weapon to the territory of another State or States. This information would also be provided for other weapons of mass destruction.

With regard to the transfer of high technology with military applications, it should be added that an expansion of the Register's scope to include such technologies should help to control and update these technological advances and the corresponding services, and to gather information on future trends in the development of dual-use science and technology and the obligations that could be assumed to guarantee that it is used for exclusively peaceful purposes.

The basic reason for further developing the Register is to eliminate or reduce to a minimum the Register's discriminatory character in its current form, since the major arms producers are required to submit only a limited amount of sensitive data, while the importer countries, the great majority of which are developing countries, must submit information that is particularly vital to their national security, which results in a clear advantage for the former.

As the Register is expanded to include the above-mentioned elements, the structure and content of the form that must be attached to the information submitted by States should be appropriately modified.

Lastly, Cuba reiterates that it is ready and willing to continue its active participation in the Register, particularly in the Group of Governmental Experts, which has convened on two occasions, 1994 and 1997, on this matter. On both occasions, Cuba sent an expert on the topic to participate in the Group.

Japan

[Original: English]
[1 June 1999]

Re: paragraph 3 (a)

The Government of Japan considers that the next priority step for expanding the scope of the Register is to include current arms holdings and procurement of indigenous production.

A gradual and stage-by-stage approach should be taken so as to ensure many countries' participation in the Register.

The Group of Governmental Experts to be convened in the year 2000 should address this proposal.

Re: paragraph 3 (b)

Weapons of mass destruction have not been the subject of the Register. The Government of Japan is very cautious about the inclusion of weapons of mass destruction in the Register because the issue will not receive consensus support of States.

The elaboration of practical means would be premature now.

United States of America

[Original: English]

[20 May 1999]

The United States is disappointed that some States continue to link the concepts of transparency in conventional arms to transparency in weapons of mass destruction. Transparency in weapons of mass destruction is clearly outside the scope of an instrument intended to increase transparency on transfers of conventional arms.

Weapons of mass destruction and issues relating to their transfer are better handled in existing treaty regimes, such as the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Three different groups of governmental experts on the United Nations Register have considered this issue, without developing a consensus on methods and approaches that would permit the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms to address transparency in weapons of mass destruction. Advocating that the Register be expanded in this fashion amounts to a convenient excuse for certain countries not to submit data on conventional arms.

The United States believes that while the seven existing reporting categories may not be ideal for every situation, they represent the best fit for the global reporting of conventional arms transfers. They identify the major weapon systems that could be used in surprise offensive action: these weapons are far more likely to be transferred and to introduce destabilizing tension into a region. The Register should remain focused on the military significance of these weapons.
