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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/53/150.

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, both as regards authorization of arms transfers and prevention of illicit transfers, in conformity with paragraph 18 of its resolution 46/36 L. Subsequent resolutions of 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 and A/52/312 and Corr.1 and 2 and Add.1-4).

5. At its fifty-second session, the General Assembly, by its resolution 52/38 R of 9 December 1997, 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.

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

³ Resolutions 50/70 D and 51/45 H.

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 5 (a) of the resolution, the Secretary-General received views from Cuba, Mexico and Saudi Arabia. A reply was also submitted by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in its capacity as President of the European Union, together with associated countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia) and Iceland and Norway. The countries members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) also associated themselves with the reply. The views are contained in annex I to the present report.

7. At the same session, the General Assembly, by its resolution 52/38 B of 9 December 1997, requested the Secretary-General to seek the views of Member States on ways and means of enhancing transparency in the fields of weapons of mass destruction and manufacture of such weapons with a view to enhancing transparency in the field of conventional weapons and to include in his report to the Assembly at its fifty-third session a special section on the implementation of the resolution. In accordance with paragraph 3 of the resolution, the Secretary-General has received views from Mexico and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in its capacity as President of the European Union, together with associated countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia) and Iceland and Norway. The EFTA countries also associated themselves with the reply. The views are contained in annex II to the present report.

8. The present report is the sixth consolidated report issued by the Secretary-General since the establishment of the Register.⁴ It contains data and information provided by 93 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 1997. The report includes for the first time additional information provided by Governments on procurement from national production and military holdings. The replies as received are contained in sections II and IV below. Any additional replies received from Governments will be issued as addenda to the present report.

9. 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 at the Department for Disarmament Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat for consultation.

⁴ The first to fourth 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 and A/52/312 and Corr.1 and 2 and Add.1-4, respectively.

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

II. Information received from Governments⁶

10. Information received from Governments is presented in this section of the report as follows: (a) a composite 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.

11. 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 table 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.



Annex I

Views received from Governments in accordance with paragraph 5 (a) of General Assembly resolution A/52/38 R

Cuba

[Original: Spanish]
[9 July 1998]

With regard to paragraph 5, subparagraph (a), of resolution 52/38 R, the Government of the Republic of Cuba wishes to make the following comments.

Cuba supports the continuing operation of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms because it values the importance of the Register as a confidence-building measure, but it also feels that, for the further development of the Register, two obstacles which, in its view, hamper the effective operation of the Register, need to be overcome.

The first obstacle is the lack of universally acceptable definitions of terms such as “excessive accumulation of arms”, “international arms transfers”, “military holdings” and “procurement through national production”.

On the basis of the foregoing, the Republic of Cuba suggests the following definitions:

“Excessive accumulation of arms” means the possession by a State of arms and equipment which, because of their quality and quantity, and the manner in which they are deployed, exceed the capacity needed for the defence of its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and may affect the security of other countries by enabling it to carry out aggression, large-scale military operations or surprise attacks through the deployment of forces prepared for this purpose, such as rapid deployment or standby forces.

Everything which falls outside this definition could be categorized as measures designed to ensure the self-defence and security of a country.

“International arms transfers” means the receipt by a State or the delivery to another State of military equipment, weapons systems, ammunition and means of delivery for such systems, through the transfer of ownership by the exporting country or by a private enterprise or company.

An international arms transfer would also be deemed to have taken place when the ownership or control of equipment or systems is transferred even without any physical transfer.

“Military holdings” refers to all arms and equipment of the seven categories included in the Register which are in service in the armed forces of a State, both within and outside its territory. This would include arms and equipment of the seven categories of the Register which are stored, for example, in previously prepared depots or storage facilities, or are intended to be kept, for example, in active or reserve units.

“Procurement through national production” refers to the receipt by the armed forces of arms and equipment supplied by the State through national production. This definition includes holdings of arms and equipment which have been produced but have not been delivered to military units and are stored in places equipped for that purpose.

The other obstacle which affects the effective functioning and greater understanding of the Register is the lack of the necessary additional confidence- and security-building measures among States, since the Register in itself does not fulfil this important objective.

The situation could be remedied by taking into account measures such as:

- An effective and internationally verifiable commitment to withdraw military bases situated in other countries as soon as requested to do so by the Governments of the host countries;
- Putting an end to the conduct of military exercises and manoeuvres in zones near countries with which there are disputes;
- Withdrawing military bases from zones which are relatively near other States or in the territory of those States;
- Eliminating threats between possible adversaries and demonstrating that their respective armed forces are not preparing for mutual aggression;
- Eliminating the risks of an accidental outbreak of war;
- Creating a climate of detente and mutual trust between hostile countries.

As to transparency measures related to weapons of mass destruction in the context of the Register, Cuba believes that the expansion of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms must include weapons of mass destruction, even though that would mean a change in the name of the Register, so as to cover these types of weapons as well.

The Government of the Republic of Cuba once again reiterates its willingness to cooperate with all actions which may contribute to realizing the aspirations of mankind to achieve general and complete disarmament.

Mexico

[Original: Spanish]
[18 August 1998]

The Government of Mexico supports the operation of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms by providing each year data on its imports and exports of conventional arms. Mexico has also been a member of the various groups of experts charged with the review and further development of the operation of the Register of Conventional Arms.

Mexico is of the view that the voluntary nature of the Register is likely to promote transparency in armaments and to build confidence. Nevertheless, it believes that a detailed analysis should be undertaken of the factors that inhibit the participation of States, including regional factors and difficulties relating to common standards or administrative difficulties. It was also necessary to have a clear definition of the concept of “arms transfers” and of the seven categories of conventional arms covered by the Register.

Mexico shares the view that, until such time as a consensus is achieved on this question, the provision of information by Member States on their military holdings and procurement through national production should continue to be on a voluntary basis.

Saudi Arabia

[Original: Arabic]
[17 June 1998]

With reference to operative paragraphs 3, 4 and 5 (a) of General Assembly resolution 52/38 R of 9 December 1997, Saudi Arabia reaffirms the reply of the Member States of the League of Arab States addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and contained

in the report of the Secretary-General of 28 August 1997 on the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (A/52/312).

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland^a

Operative paragraph 5 (a) of resolution 52/38 R requests Member States to provide the Secretary-General with their views on the continuing operation of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and its further development and on transparency measures related to weapons of mass destruction.

Operative paragraph 3 of resolution 52/38 B requests the Secretary-General to seek the views of Member States on ways and means of enhancing transparency in the fields of weapons of mass destruction and transfers of equipment and technologies directly related to the development and manufacture of such weapons with a view to enhancing transparency in the field of conventional weapons.

Arms control and disarmament increasingly takes centre stage in the continued promotion of peace and stability in the world. Transparency in armaments serves well to build confidence and security between States.

The European Union is convinced that the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms is an important instrument to this end because it provides data on international arms transfers of those categories of conventional arms which are potentially destabilizing when accumulated excessively. In the five years of its existence, about 90 States, including all European Union member States, have submitted information on their conventional arms.

In order to enhance its effectiveness as a global confidence-building measure, every effort should be made to secure the widest possible participation. The member States of the European Union encourage all States Members to submit data to the Register and emphasize that even “nil” reports are an important contribution.

The member States of the European Union furthermore believe that inclusion of data on military holdings and procurement through national production makes the Register more complete and useful.

The member States of the European Union emphasize, however, that transparency measures for conventional arms are of a different nature than those related to weapons of mass destruction. Such measures should be part of the arms control and disarmament process in that field and should not be confused with that process in the field of conventional arms. The member States of the European Union therefore regret that resolution 52/38 B unequivocally links transparency measures for conventional arms to those for weapons of mass destruction.

Although 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 member States of the European Union reiterate that transparency in conventional armaments would not have been as successful as they are at present if measures in that field had been extended to that of the weapons of mass destruction. The Group of Governmental Experts rightly concluded that further development of the Register should be aimed at increasing transparency of conventional arms and not at

^a In its capacity as President of the European Union, together with associated countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia) and Iceland and Norway, as well as the countries members of the European Free Trade Association.

including transparency of other categories of armaments. The non-respect of such a fundamental distinction would seriously affect the viability of the Register while jeopardizing any further improvement with regard to the scope of participation and the level of transparency.

The member States of the European Union are committed to the further development of the Register and call upon all States Members of the United Nations to provide the requested data and information. They will continue to participate actively in all appropriate forums to discuss effective ways and means to further build security and confidence through transparency in armaments.

Annex II

Views received from Governments in accordance with paragraph 3 of General Assembly resolution A/52/38 B

Mexico

[Original: Spanish]

[18 August 1998]

Mexico continues to support transparency with respect to all types of armaments as an important contribution to the establishment of confidence-building measures and to the strengthening of international security. Mexico has participated in the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms since the establishment of the Register in 1992. It has also been a member of the various expert groups charged with reviewing the operation of the Register.

Mexico believes that in order for the Register to have a global impact in building confidence and to help create a climate conducive to disarmament, it must in future include both weapons of mass destruction, whose destructive and destabilizing power is far greater than that of conventional arms, and transfers of high technology with military applications. This would lead States that possess nuclear weapons and these technologies to throw their full weight behind common efforts to achieve transparency and build confidence, thereby promoting the objective of general and complete disarmament.

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland^a

The views received from the United Kingdom were in response to both General Assembly resolutions 52/38 R and 52/38 B. They are reproduced in annex I only.

^a In its capacity as President of the European Union, together with associated countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia) and Iceland and Norway, as well as the countries members of the European Free Trade Association.