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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/55/150.

** Finalization of the report was dependent on the completion of the work of the Group of Governmental Experts on the operation and further development of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms. The work of the Group ended on 4 August 2000.

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 its 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; A/53/334 and Corr.1 and 2 and Add.1 and 2; and A/54/226 and Corr.1 and Add.1-6).

5. At its fifty-fourth session, the General Assembly, by its resolution 54/54 O of 1 December 1999, 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, para. 64). In addition, the Assembly invited Member States in a position to do so, pending further development of the Register, to provide additional information on

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, 52/38 R, 53/77 V and 53/77 S.

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.

6. By the same resolution, the General Assembly reaffirmed its decision, with a view to the further development of the Register, to keep the scope of and participation in the Register under review, and to that end recalled its request to 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 Portugal (on behalf of the European Union). Those views are contained in annex I to the present report.

7. At the same session, the General Assembly, by its resolution 54/54 I of 1 December 1999, requested the Secretary-General, with the assistance of the Group of Governmental Experts to be convened in 2000⁴ and taking into account the views submitted by Member States, to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session on:

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

(b) The elaboration of practical means for the 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 4 of resolution 54/54 I, the Secretary-General has received views from Japan, San Marino and Singapore. Those views are contained in annex II to the present report.

9. The present report is the eighth consolidated report issued by the Secretary-General since the establishment of the Register.⁵ It contains data and information provided by 84 Governments 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, and missiles and missile launchers — for the calendar year 1999. 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 2000 Group of Governmental Experts met in three sessions, from 6 to 10 March, 22 May to 2 June and 24 July to 4 August 2000.

⁵ The first to seventh 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; A/53/334 and Corr.1 and 2 and Add.1 and 2; and A/54/226 and Corr.1 and Add.1-6.

II. Information received from Governments¹

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.

¹ 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 4 (a) of General Assembly resolution 54/54 O

Portugal

[Original: English]

[5 June 2000]

European Union: common reply concerning General Assembly resolution 54/54 O on transparency in armaments

The General Assembly in resolution 54/54 O requests States Members 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.

The States members of the European Union (EU) consider transparency in armaments an important instrument in building confidence and security between States. The United Nations 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 EU member States are committed to securing the widest possible participation in the Register and improving its effectiveness. In this context, efforts of the Union in support of securing wider participation have shown that only in exceptional cases, non-participation is motivated by disagreement with the concept embodied in the Register.

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

The EU member States welcome all efforts to further strengthen the role of the Register in the field of conventional arms control. They support the work of the Group of Governmental Experts which has been tasked to assist the Secretary-General in the preparation of a report with a view to a decision at the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly.

The EU member States are confident that the Experts Group will be able to agree on effective ways to further transparency in armaments and put forward suggestions to that end in its report. In this context, the Union supports early expansion of the scope of the Register and the efforts of the Group to that effect. The EU member States furthermore believe that technical adjustments to the categories of the Register, such as lowering the threshold for large-calibre artillery systems in category III, could assist in making the Register more relevant to certain regions, thereby contributing to wider participation in the Register.

The EU member States find the work of the Conference on 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.

With a view to General Assembly resolution 54/54 I, they would point out, however, that measures in the field of conventional arms should be distinguished from those aimed at increased transparency in the field of weapons of mass destruction. The EU member States therefore regret the adoption of resolution 54/54 I on transparency in armaments, which unequivocally links transparency measures in the field of weapons of mass destruction to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms.

The EU member States agree that transparency in the field of weapons of mass destruction is important and that measures aimed at enhancing such transparency should be developed. 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 would be jeopardized.

The EU member States 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 States Members of the United Nations.

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

Annex II

Views received from Governments in accordance with paragraph 4 of General Assembly resolution 54/54 I

Japan

[Original: English]
[22 June 2000]

Paragraph 4 (a)

The Government of Japan considers that the expansion of the scope of the Register, especially by including procurement through national production, will be a significant step forward. The Group of Governmental Experts convened this year should address this proposal.

Paragraph 4 (b)

The Register is aimed at increasing the transparency, not of weapons of mass destruction, but of conventional arms. The Government of Japan does not believe that the attempt to incorporate weapons of mass destruction into the existing Register will receive secure enough support from Member States.

San Marino

[Original: English]
[31 May 2000]

The Republic of San Marino is in favour of the measures listed in the above-mentioned resolution regarding the enlargement of the Register and the establishment of practical means to develop it with the aim of increasing transparency in the field.

Singapore

[Original: English]
[15 June 2000]

The Republic of Singapore believes that the immediate priority should be the universal acceptance of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms as a key instrument in enhancing confidence and transparency among States Members of the United Nations. Accordingly, it is necessary to gain the widest support possible for the Register in its present form, before considering its expansion.

While the Republic of Singapore supports the concept of increasing transparency in respect of weapons of mass destruction, the Register may not be the most appropriate vehicle for this. Any attempt to broaden the scope of the Register, before all Members of the United Nations are comfortable with its current format, could be counter-productive. It could result in a general loss of support for the Register, and in fact reduce arms transparency and international confidence-building.