(SWITZERLAND)

Meeting of Experts 2012, CCW Protocol V – Generic Preventive Measures

Mr. Coordinator

As this is the first time our delegation takes the floor, let me congratulate the president-designate for the assumption of his role and express my delegation’s full support. The Swiss delegation would also like to commend you, Mr. Coordinator, for your skilful preparation of our deliberations on Generic Preventive Measures today. Likewise, we would like the express our sincere thanks for the very substantive and thought-provoking presentations by the various States Parties, regional and non-governmental organizations.

Mr. Coordinator

For Switzerland, safety and security in ammunition storage facilities is a highly relevant topic. We would therefore like to contribute some provisional food-for-thought for our discussion today:

With regard to safety, the detonation of an ammunition storage facility and the subsequent tragic and disastrous effects in Brazzaville in the Republic of Congo in early March 2012 illustrate the risk to civilians as well as to members of security and armed forces in the vicinity of such a facility. Simultaneously, the recent events in Northern Africa have illustrated the relevance of security of ammunition storage facilities and the need to protect stored ammunitions against the risk of loss through capture, theft, corruption or neglect, and diversion through unauthorized transfer.

These two examples indicate the broad spectrum of questions related to safety and security of ammunition storage facilities. We very much agree with you, Mr. Coordinator, that some of these questions may indeed go beyond the scope of application of CCW Protocol V and its main focus on the post-conflict environment: Accidents with stored ammunition may well result in highly dangerous explosive remnants, but not always in explosive remnants of war. Moreover, the questions related for safety and security do not only apply to explosive ammunition, but also to all other types of ammunition and components as well. In consequence, many aspects of ammunition storage are, for instance, also treated in the broader context of international instruments on small arms and light weapons.

Such a preliminary conclusion seems to be confirmed by the number of already available material on ammunition storage in general. The “Guide to Ammunition Storage”, published by the GICHD in 2008, provides a very helpful overview of existing standards and norms on ammunition storage. We also believe that your very sensible choice of presentations and the variety of relevant actors, Mr. Coordinator, could support such a view.

Based on this, my delegation believes that it could be a very fruitful approach for us as States Parties to Protocol V to jointly crystallize those aspects in which the application of Protocol V and the topic of safety and security in ammunition storage facilities overlap. We see a number of points that could be interesting to discuss:
Part 3 of the Technical Annex refers under paragraph (b) and its sub-paragraph to munitions management. In our view, the practices help to minimize the damage to stockpiled and transferred ammunition in order to keep the reliability as high as possible. In other words, the practices focus on measures that should keep the risk of failure in the functioning of ammunition as low as possible, thus minimizing the risk of new ERW — as also indicated in Article 9 of the Protocol. (We would be interested in hearing views from other States Parties on this.)

However, the Technical Annex also states that the risk of explosions in stockpiles should be minimized by the use of appropriate stockpile arrangements, although there are no further specifications what such arrangements might be. It could be interesting to analyze this provision with its implied security and safety aspects in the context of armed conflict and the post-conflict environment, and, of course, in the context of potential clearance obligations under Protocol V.

Do Generic Preventive Measures in the field of munitions management have a particular relevance for other CCW instruments? Particularly the discussions on IEDs in the framework of Amended Protocol II have repeatedly referred to the implementation of Protocol V as a measure to cut the proliferation of munitions potentially used as components for IEDs. Protocol V does not directly refer to physical security, yet contains in Annex 3 under paragraph (b), sub-paragraph (i) the reference to explosive ordnance to be stored in "secure facilities or appropriate containers that protect the explosive ordnance and its components in a controlled atmosphere, if necessary" [unquote].

And last but not least, in a much more general view, it could be helpful also to establish an overview over all relevant instruments and highlight their particularities and areas of application. This could be helpful for both donor states and affected countries in the context of international cooperation and assistance when facing challenges with ammunition storage facilities.

As indicated at the beginning of our statement, these remarks represent some provisional food-for-thought. We are very much looking forward to continued discussions on aspects of safety and security of ammunition storage facilities that are relevant for Protocol V; likewise, we believe that it is worth specifying the added-value of Protocol V within this broad topic.

Thank you very much.