Open-Ended Working Group to elaborate a set of political commitments that would form a new global framework to address existing gaps in through-life ammunition management

Opening Remarks by Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

As delivered

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Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to the first substantive session of the open-ended working group to elaborate a set of political commitments that would form a new global framework to address existing gaps in through-life ammunition management.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Ammunition has long lacked dedicated attention at the multilateral level. While expert-level discussions on ammunition and explosives took place in the 1990s, focus remained largely on small arms and light weapons ammunition, rather than on conventional ammunition more broadly. And over the past decades, the discussions on small arms and light weapons ammunition have been characterized by the ongoing divergence of views related to the inclusion of ammunition in the framework of the UN Programme of Action.

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. The explosive nature of ammunition makes this materiel especially attractive for the manufacture of improvised explosive devices by non-state actors. The diversion of conventional ammunition, including small arms and light weapons ammunition, also plays a central role in initiating, exacerbating and sustaining armed conflict, pervasive violence and also acts of crime and terrorism.

The establishment of this Open-Ended Working Group thus responds to the urgent need to raise the profile of conventional ammunition as an issue of standalone concern from the perspective of safety and security.

In order to address the problem posed by conventional ammunition at the global level, recent efforts have concentrated on the development and ongoing improvement of the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines and the establishment of the UN SaferGuard Programme as the corresponding knowledge management platform under United Nations auspices. This
has been the result of the 2008 Group of Governmental Experts which focused on the safety and security of ammunition stockpiles.

The United Nations Secretary-General continues to underscore the importance of effective management of ammunition as a means to support conflict prevention, the protection of civilians, and building and sustaining peace. Accordingly, weapons and ammunition management activities are increasingly playing a key role in United Nations peace operations and in activities of the Security Council to address conflict affected situations and counter the activities of armed groups.

Despite these significant developments and the progress made, conventional ammunition remains the “orphan” of conventional arms control without a dedicated regulatory framework at the global level.

With the conclusion of the latest Group of Governmental Experts in 2021, I welcome the momentum that has been created among States to comprehensively address conventional ammunition as a standalone issue of concern.

In accordance with its mandate, I encourage this Group to build on the important observations and assessments made by the GGE, including its conclusion that the safety and security challenges 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.

With its recommendations that tackle both the safety and security aspects of conventional ammunition, the 2020-2021 GGE has laid the groundwork for this Group to carry out its important task to elaborate a set of political commitments as a new global framework to address existing gaps in through-life management of conventional ammunition.

We are presented here with the great opportunity to close the gap at the international level with the establishment of a global instrument that can support the prevention of unplanned explosions as well as diversion of ammunition and to address the issue in a comprehensive manner.
I am confident that the efforts you will invest over the three sessions of this Open-Ended Working Group will provide the international community with a comprehensive framework for the through-life management of conventional ammunition.

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

I thank you very much for your attention.