The need for better stockpile management in Africa

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Thank you Mr. Chair,

I'm here today to raise concerns about the many African countries that are severely lacking in the resources needed to implement effective stockpile management. I speak as someone who has worked on a baseline assessment that faced many problems with existing stockpile management.

Several African countries lack the specific guidelines to even determine what constitutes a safe and secure storage facility for arms and ammunition. Legally owned firearms have been stolen from their residences because they were not securely stored. There are often no standards for building and maintaining state armouries. As a result some armouries are seldom constructed from scratch; instead a room in a police station is usually just allocated for that use.

Research on effective management of national weapons and ammunition stockpiles consistently demonstrates the need for a comprehensive approach. Stockpile management requires finding appropriate locations and setting up effective physical security systems. Accurate classification and accounting can only take place with robust inventory practices and regular inspection and surveillance.

Classification and accounting is essential to ensure safe handling and storage and to identify surplus awaiting disposal. Surveillance and testing procedures are also critical in order to accurately assess the stability and reliability of ammunition. Personnel responsible for safe storage and surveillance must be adequately trained. Many at this meeting have spoken of the risk of weapons being diverted into the illicit domain. But ineffective stockpile management also causes civilian casualties from ammunition depot explosions.
Ammunition depot explosions often occur in Africa. For example, during 2012, an explosion in Congo, Brazzaville resulted in more than 500 fatalities; approximately 3277 people were injured. During 2011, explosive incidents in Africa also occurred in Cote D’Ivoire, Tanzania, DRC and four explosions in Libya within the same year, which shows the magnitude of the challenges associated with stockpile management.

It’s not logical to discuss responsible stockpile management without including ammunition. All the governments here have stocks of both arms and ammunition, and they are often stored in the same facilities. In practice any sensible approach to stockpile management has to cover weapons and their ammunition.

All States represented here have a responsibility to prevent arms under lawful authority from being diverted. You also have a responsibility to reduce the risk of unplanned explosions.

Specifically, this means:

- ensuring the physical security of arms and ammunition stocks; and managing inventories to ensure that you know exactly what is in the stockpiles, and where that equipment is located.
- destroying arms and ammunition that are stored in insecure locations. Destruction is always preferable to diversion into illicit hands. States must regularly assess their stocks and destroy surplus arms and ammunition.
- rigorously assessing the risks of diversion when licensing exports. If the risk is unacceptably high then an export should not be made.
- ensuring that all arms within your borders are secure, including those owned by private individuals and companies. Governments can and often do mandate legal requirements for safe storage of arms in the home or the workplace.
- providing assistance. Stockpile management requires resources and technical expertise. States need to undertake a long-term commitment to cooperate in promoting better stockpile management, and to provide enough assistance to make it happen.
Mr. Chair, the challenges to effective stockpile management in Africa are not insurmountable. Efforts are under way in many African states to implement international standards on small arms and light weapons and ammunition. Continued depot explosions and diversions in recent years suggest that further action is required.

Greater efforts by African States and their cooperation with international partners can make important contributions to strengthening national stockpile management in Africa. Such efforts are essential to effectively limit the risks of explosions and diversion in Africa. Civil society is counting on you and willing to help make our countries more secure.

Thank you!