Amb. Roet Addresses UNSC on Small Arms

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Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations

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Madame President. Let me begin by thanking you for your able stewardship of the Security Council this month – and for holding this very important debate. More than half a million people die every year as a result of the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons.

Last year, Israel was proud to sign the Arms Trade Treaty. Israel supports the principles and goals of the treaty and believes it is an important step towards better regulating the trade in arms and preventing weapons from reaching terrorist groups and rogue actors. Israel has passed significant pieces of legislation to guide its own robust export control system.

Madame President,

In the Middle East, the illicit trafficking of small arms is a big problem.

Small arms are the weapons of choice for terrorists who seek to spread fear and undermine stability. For years Iran has destabilized and radicalized the Middle East. In recent years it has also intensified its campaign to smuggle weapons to its terrorist proxies, including the Houthis in Yemen, Shiite militias in Iraq, Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Syrian Golan, and Hamas in Gaza.

Last summer, Hamas terrorists fired over 3,800 rockets and mortars from Gaza towards Israeli civilian communities – an average of one projectile every 10 minutes.

One of these mortars hit the home of Gila and Doron Tragerman. Their four year-old son, Daniel was playing in the living room when the mortar shell slammed into their house and killed the little boy. Two days later, Ze’ev Etzion and Shahar Melamed from Kibbutz Nirim were also killed by mortars fired by terrorists in Gaza.

The grim reality is that small arms will continue to take the lives of innocent civilians, unless this Council takes meaningful steps to enforce the compliance of sanctions and arms embargos, particularly with regard to Iran. The Iranian regime regularly transfers tons of weapons and munitions to Hezbollah terrorists in blatant violation of 4 Security Council resolutions - 1559, 1701, 1747 and 1929. If the international community continues to be MIA, these resolutions will continue to be DOA.

Madame President,

In Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, terrorists groups have taken advantage of the chaos and instability to raid unsecured weapons caches. After securing the weapons, terrorist groups recruit and kidnap young boys to fight their battles. In Yemen, for instance, 7 year-old Hassan, was recruited by Houthi rebels to man checkpoints. Instead of learning to read and write, Hassan’s only lessons are how to use his Kalashnikov rifle.

Like Hassan, countless young boys, have been forced to give up their childhoods to fight someone else’s war. The next generation of children in our region deserves a brighter future – a future without hate, without conflict, and without terror.

Every nation is threatened by the proliferation, illegal transfer, and misuse of small arms. Following the downfall of Moammar Gadhafi, armories brimming with assault rifles, grenades, and surface-to-air missiles were plundered by militants. Thousands of Libya’s 20,000 surface-to-air missiles have fallen into the hands of non-state actors and terrorists. Similarly,

The uncontrolled trafficking of shoulder-fired missiles known as “MANPADS” is of particular concern to Israel. In 2002, al-Qaeda affiliated terrorists in Mombassa, Kenya, fired two surface-to-air missiles at an Israel Airlines plane. The missiles narrowly missed, but the attack marked a turning point - terrorists were now targeting civilian airliners.

In recent years, the Middle East has seen the proliferation of thousands of MANPADS. Misleadingly categorized as small arms and light weapons, MANPADS have the potential to cause mass casualties and undermine stability. The threat is very real and demands the immediate attention of the international community.

Madame President,

At this moment, as we speak, smuggling ships are steaming across the high seas, cargo trucks are snaking across mountain passes, and small aircraft packed with illegal weapons are flying low to avoid detection. The mortars and missile launchers that they carry could take dozens of innocent lives and spark the next major conflict.

Terrorists and their backers depend on divisions in the international community to keep their operations afloat. No nation is free from responsibility. And no nation can escape the consequences of inaction. This Council must take a bold first step by holding accountable those member states that arm, train and fund terrorists. The failure to act today will invite disaster tomorrow.

Thank you, Madame President.