



Press Release DC/2875

Meeting of States to Consider Action
Programme on Illicit Small Arms Trade
5th & 6th Meetings (AM & PM)

BIENNIAL MEETING OF STATES CONCLUDES CONSIDERATION OF NATIONAL PLANS TO CURB ILLICIT SMALL ARMS TRADE, HEARS PROPOSALS FROM CIVIL SOCIETY

Consideration of national plans to implement the 2001 Programme of Action on the illicit small arms and light weapons trade concluded today, with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups weighing in about how to advance implementation, as the week-long Biennial Meeting on the small arms question continued.

The Meeting, which forms part of a follow-up to the July 2001 Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, is considering implementation of the action plan, formally known as the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. It identifies national, regional and global measures to combat the illicit small arms trade, focusing on, among other things, legislation, stockpile management, weapons destruction, and identification and tracing.

Following two days of consideration of national plans, Member States this morning highlighted new national legislation, as well as efforts to collect, destroy and register illicit weapons. Several stressed the importance of regional and international cooperation, pointing to cross-border proliferation and increasingly transnational networks of brokers, dealers, financiers and transporters.

Some delegates noted that differences, as well as weaknesses, in legal definitions, regulation, oversight, marking and record-keeping had exacerbated the problem. Others pointed to the particular problems face by countries affected by internal conflicts, where large stockpiles of weapons and ammunition could be stolen for use by paramilitaries, or sold off along with illegally produced armaments.

Speakers from civil society groups and NGOs this afternoon stressed the vital need to tighten national legislation, eradicate illegal arms transfers, and draw up an international treaty on the marking and tracing of small arms.

A representative of WINAD, an NGO based in Trinidad and Tobago, said that governments were responsible for the "global flood" of small arms, either by selling or giving away millions of new and surplus small arms, or by maintaining legislative loopholes allowing those weapons to flow into the hands of despots, bandits and

human rights abusers. As the perpetrators of that “flood”, governments bore responsibility for solving the problem, she added.

Echoing that theme, a representative of the Foundation Paul Ango Ela pour la promotion de la geopolitique, noted that some governments, for commercial reasons, had failed to correct abuses in their regulatory mechanisms to halt the illegal trade in small arms. Only an international treaty on markings and tracings would close those loopholes, making it possible to trace arms. That treaty should also include measures directed at developing international arms registers and ensure that weapons were not diverted.

A representative of the Arias Foundation commented that some regional organizations had actually tightened criteria for weapons transfers, but diversions still occurred. She stressed that States manufacturing weapons must strengthen their export controls to ensure that arms did not go to groups or individuals flouting international law. In many areas, illicit traffic was encouraged by authorized agencies, particularly in conflict zones where weapons moved easily from areas under embargo to other areas.

Other speakers highlighted ongoing work in firearms marking and cautioned against destroying all surplus arms, insisting that an international instrument was unnecessary. A representative of the World Forum on the Future of Sport Shooting Activities Manufacturers Advisory Group, highlighted workshops organized by the Forum on markings and tracings last June, and stressed that the United States, as well as the European firearms industry, had regulated themselves for many years.

Another participant, from the National Muzzle Loading Rifle Association of the United States, speaking also for the Civilian Marksmanship Programme in the United States, called for the rejection of proposals to deactivate all surplus weapons, including those in museums. Civilians used surplus military arms for competition shooting events, and acceding to proposals to destroy surplus military arms would limit the equipment and activities they enjoyed.

Speakers at the morning meeting included the representatives of Nigeria, Sudan, Senegal, Yemen, Cuba, Republic of Moldova, Mali, Benin, Haiti, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Côte d'Ivoire, Hungary, Ghana, United Republic of Tanzania, Gabon, Oman, Gambia, Rwanda, Ecuador, Palau, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Georgia.

In addition, the United States and Cuba exercised their rights of reply.

Also speaking this afternoon were representatives of South Asia Partnership, Oxfam, Saferworld, the International Action Network on Small Arms, additional member groups of the World Forum on the Future of Sport Shooting Activities, Canadian Institute for Legislative Action, Institute for War and Peace Reporting in Armenia, and Regional Human Rights Security Center of Jordan.

The following delegations responded to the statements made by NGOs and civil society groups: Uganda, Philippines, Canada, Mexico, and Costa Rica.

The Meeting will convene again at 10 a.m. to take up consideration of regional and global implementation of the Programme of Action.

Background

The First Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspects met this morning to conclude its consideration of implementation of the Programme of Action.

The Meeting was also expected to take up consideration of national, regional and global implementation of the Programme of Action, and to hear statements from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society. (For background information, see Press Release DC/2871, issued on 3 July.)

Statements

CHUKA UDEBIBIA (Nigeria) outlined the impediment to peace, stability, security and economic development that trade in small arms posed to many developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. To implement the Programme of Action in his country, a National Committee on Small Arms and Light Weapons had been established in 2001. Its purpose was to control the import and manufacture of weapons, to register and control the movement of legitimate arms stocks, and to detect and destroy illicit and surplus weapons, with a weapons destruction effort scheduled for today. Nigeria's Firearms Control Act required approval at the highest level for acquiring firearms for personal use, and regular joint border patrol activities were carried out with neighbours. Regional actions included participation in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) moratorium on the import, export and manufacture of small arms and light weapons in West Africa.

Efforts to implement the Programme of Action had been largely successful, but serious problems had impeded effort in some areas, he continued. A growing problem was the lack of modern surveillance equipment and appropriate screeners and scanners. Illicit arms from ex-combatants in the subregion also found a ready market in his country. An "Arms for Development" project to eliminate the circulation of small arms in the country had been proposed to the National Committee, and resources were being sought to execute it. Prospective partners could also help in areas of technical cooperation, staff training and data bank/arms registration.

ELFATIH MOHAMED AHMED ERWA (Sudan) said the illicit small arms trade ran counter to international humanitarian law and led to violence -- fuelling ethnic, religious and political conflict. The arms problem was multidimensional because it was linked to terrorism and drug trafficking. It was vital that international efforts be made to eradicate it, from both the supply and demand sides. More strict controls should be applied with respect to the marking, import and export, and transit of such weapons. The international community should draw up an international instrument dealing with those aspects.

He said that the Sudan was one of the first African countries to have realized just how dangerous the illicit small arms trade was, and had participated in several regional efforts to eradicate it. His country's report showed that progress had been made in revising its legislation and regulations directed at small arms and light weapons, as well as weapons trafficking. The Sudan had also set up a national office in the Ministry of Interior, which had competence in referencing arms.

CHEIKH NIANG (Senegal) said his country associated itself with the statement made on behalf of the African Group by the representative of Nigeria. Senegal had understood the dangers of illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and, as early as 1966, had taken draconian measures to curb their proliferation. He referred to the initiative of the West African States to deal with the phenomenon through the adoption in 1998 of a moratorium on the manufacture, distribution and trade in illicit small arms and light weapons in the subregion.

He noted that his country had established a national commission, which was responsible for the implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action and the West African moratorium. The activities of the national commission had two main objectives — controlling the sources of supplies of illegal small arms, and the development of programmes to sensitize the public about the dangers of those weapons. Special emphasis was being placed on monitoring borders, waterways and ports to check illicit movements of small arms.

ALI MOHAMED (Yemen) said his country had prioritized the problem of small arms and light weapons and was making every effort to promote international cooperation to control them. It was also attempting to convince its citizens not to carry or use small arms and light weapons, and had recently enacted legislation to address those aspects.

He said his country was interested in cooperating with other nations in facing the scourge of small arms and light weapons. It was convinced that trans-border cooperation was vital in controlling such weapons, and had been consulting with other nations about setting up mechanisms that would ensure cooperation in line with the objectives of the Programme of Action.

BRUNO RODRIGUEZ PARRILLA (Cuba) said his country was determined to implement the Programme of Action. Cuba had, for over 40 years, been suffering from terrorist acts organized and financed on United States soil. It had presented proof of all those attacks and had seized some of the weapons used. The United States authorities themselves had intercepted some of the weapons themselves. It was public knowledge that the attackers were groups based in Miami, Florida. Cuba reaffirmed its support for the call in the action plan for States to act to stop terrorist attacks.

He said Cuba reaffirmed the right of all States to manufacture arms to meet their legitimate defence requirements, as enshrined in the United Nations Charter. Cuba had adopted measures to implement the action plan. For example, its criminal code prohibited the manufacture of arms. Cuba was also party to a number of international instruments related to firearms, and had put in place measures to control the spread of illicit small arms. The Interior Ministry controlled firearms imports.

VSEVOLOD GRIGORE (Republic of Moldova) said he fully shared the international community's concern over the proliferation of small and light weapons, whose excessive and uncontrolled accumulation and spread threatened peace and security. Such proliferation also reduced prospects for sustainable development in many regions of the world.

He said in countries affected by internal conflicts, such as the Republic of Moldova, the presence of large stockpiles of weapons and ammunition was particularly risky because of the danger of their being stolen for use by the paramilitaries, or sold off along with illegally produced armaments. For that and other related reasons, his country supported a comprehensive, joint approach by all stakeholders to the small arms problems.

He supported those who, during the current meeting, had emphasized the importance of international assistance and cooperation if national, regional and global efforts to curb the proliferation and illicit trafficking of those weapons were to be successful. Further, an appropriate level of financial and technical assistance should be made available for countries in need, along with the political support of the international community, he said.

Mr. SIDI DIARRA (Mali) urged all nations to fully implement various international accords, conventions and standards that addressed the problem of small arms and light weapons. Such texts were vital in the collective struggle to reduce the human costs of such weapons. Particular attention should be paid to the fate of children in armed conflict. The international community must consolidate its efforts to assist those children by implementing effective parts of relevant United Nations conventions -- to protect the children themselves and to ensure they did not become competent in the use of armed weapons.

He then described the recent activities of a group to which Mali belonged, called the Human Security Network, which had prioritized the struggle against the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. He appealed urgently to the international community to step up their efforts to combat that threat. Turning to efforts Mali had made to combat the small arms problem, he said it had created a national commission against the proliferation of small weapons and was also attempting to ensure that legal texts were properly applied. Efforts were also being made to collect weapons, destroy them at ceremonies, and to increase public awareness of the dangers of small weapons.

JEAN-FRANCIS ZINSOU (Benin) said his country fully endorsed the statement made by the representative of Nigeria on behalf of the African Group. He said political will must be mobilized to combat the scourge of illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. The circulation of those weapons posed a great danger to the subregion. Production of small arms by local craftsmen was assuming an unprecedented dimension. Benin had taken measures to curb proliferation of small arms, and civil society was educating the public about the dangers posed by those weapons.

He said his Government had enacted legislation, which called for severe punishment for the illegal possession of arms. A census had also been taken of arms stocks in the country. Internationally, Benin had ratified a number of legal instruments, of a regional and global scope, dealing with firearms, and it had been organizing joint patrols with Nigeria of their common borders.

Mr. FABIAN (Haiti) noted that positive developments to eradicate the small arms problem had occurred at the regional and international levels, but he stressed that 60 people were still killed each hour by small arms and light weapons. Thousands of those weapons were in circulation, promoting violations of human security and human rights. The proliferation of such arms had increased lately in Haiti. That was linked to

the fact that the country's borders were porous, which facilitated the entry of small arms and light weapons. Another major reason for the increase was the precariousness of the socio-economic conditions in the country.

He said Haiti had been mobilized to deal with the small arms problem for several months, with a view to developing adequate strategies and action plans. His country was willing to share its experiences with other States in the global effort to eradicate the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. A national disarmament commission had been set up to coordinate activities dealing with circulation of those arms throughout the country, and efforts were under way to better control points of entry to the national territory. The challenge was great, when statistics showed that 90 per cent of the victims of armed conflicts were civilians.

HASAN DERVISBEGOVIC (Bosnia and Herzegovina) said the arms control regime in his country had been set up and controlled by the multinational stabilization force (SFOR). In addition, two agreements had been signed — the Agreement on Confidence and Security Measures in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1996) and the Agreement on Subregional Arms Control (1996). Until now, collection of small arms and light weapons had been carried out by SFOR, in cooperation with local police, State border police, military authorities and civil protection authorities. An operation called "Harvest", which was initiated by SFOR in 1998, also included local authorities.

He said that "Harvest" was accompanied by a media campaign to raise awareness among the population on the need to voluntarily surrender arms. From 1998 to 2003, 17,600 small arms and light weapons and more than 4 million pieces of ammunition had been collected and destroyed. Reform of the armed forces was also progressing, and the number of soldiers had been reduced by ten-fold, which had had reduced the quantity of small arms and light weapons from 540,000 pieces in 1999 to 210,000 pieces in 2003. Draft legislation on small arms included the Law on the Import and Export of Weapons and Military Equipment, which was in its final stages of approval, and the Law in Manufacture of Arms and Military Equipment, which could be in force by the end of this year.

KABA D. CAMARA (Côte d'Ivoire) said that her country, which had recently emerged from conflict, paid particular attention to the problem of illicit small arms and light weapons. It had signed the ECOWAS moratorium on the manufacture, export, import and distribution of small arms. It had also participated enthusiastically in the 2001 United Nations Conference on small arms. A national commission had been set up to deal with the implementation of the Programme of Action of that Conference.

Referring to the number of civil conflicts that had broken out in several countries in the subregion in recent years, she noted that the alarming proliferation of small arms and light weapons had become a permanent danger. The recent crisis in her country had led to the influx of those weapons. Yet, she reassured neighbouring countries that Côte d'Ivoire had no interest in arming itself beyond its legitimate need.

She referred to the disarmament process now under way in the country, following the resolution of the conflict under ECOWAS' brokered peace agreement. Border controls were in force to collect and destroy illegal weapons. A data bank was being established to identify the sources of supply of those weapons, and disarmament was an important part of peace and national reconciliation. The Government was

implementing a timetable for the demobilization of former combatants, all of whom were collaborating with the programme. And, a special fund had been established by the Government for that purpose. Her country would very soon regain its place as a haven of peace and brotherhood, she said.

LASZLO MOLNAR (Hungary) said his country was committed to working with regional partners and civil society to tackle the problems related to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, particularly in South-eastern Europe. It had also taken an active part in efforts to develop common norms and standards for arms trade within the framework of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Wassenaar Arrangement to fight against international terrorism and organized crime at the global, regional and subregional levels. In that respect, Hungary had contributed to the organizational costs of a subregional conference organized jointly by the United Nations and the OSCE in Slovenia, in March 2003.

He said his country believed that the involvement of civil society was vital in efforts to control small arms and light weapons. Therefore, it had initiated the Szeged Small Arms Process, which was a programme of work to combat the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, which had occurred in South-eastern Europe. It was launched in Szeged, Hungary, in November 2000 at a meeting of representatives of governments, international and civil society organizations. Since the process began, over 200 people had taken part in meetings and projects within that framework.

IDIRISU M. BIYIRA (Ghana) said the growth in light weapons and illicit arms trafficking was a grave menace to stability, peace and sustainable development, particularly in the West African subregion. The easy availability of small arms and mercenaries had helped generate and prolong the conflicts in West Africa, particularly in the Mano River Union area. The problem should be addressed by tightening legal controls on the manufacture, transfer, brokering and possession of firearms and ammunitions, including those in the possession of States. International transparency on illicit trade should also be increased and national legislation governing arms trade and possession of weapons should be strengthened.

He said that a national coordinating body had been established in Ghana to deal with the implementation of the action plan. It had issued relevant documents to raise public awareness on illicit holdings of small arms, as well as on the need for good stockpile management. It had also, in collaboration with civil society groups, mounted public-awareness campaigns to promote the culture of peace.

KAGYABUKAMA KILIBA (United Republic of Tanzania) said his country had carried out a study to identify the nature and extent of small arms proliferation in terms of supply and demand, and the existing capacity and available resources to address the problem. A national action plan had then been developed, which consisted of projects to be implemented jointly by the Government and civil society. The plan aimed to consolidate the country's capacity in the field over the next five years. The projects clustered around such elements as a review of national legislation, training and capacity-building, international and regional cooperation and information exchange, public awareness and education, and critical areas support.

Since adopting the national action plan, he continued, his country had created a national focal point and established regional task forces for arms management and

disarmament. It had also reviewed and created administrative procedures for controlling firearms and explosives, and enhanced the capacity of civil society to ensure effective implementation of the national action plan. He noted that public support had increased since adopting the national plan, and described an ongoing three-month programme to destroy weapons collected under the plan. Other projects included the training of government officials working as focal points in arms management, and the organizing and hosting of joint training workshops to maintain effective cooperation.

ALFRED MOUNGARA-MOUSSOTSI (Gabon) associated himself with the statement made on behalf of the African States. Gabon had worked hard, both nationally and at the subregional level, to ensure the implementation of the action plan. At the national level, it had put in place measures to control the import and circulation of illegal small arms and light weapons. Its Interior Ministry was responsible for regulating small arms and light weapons entering the country. Legislation already in force was being updated. Only hunting rifles were allowed. Anti-crime units were also focal points for curbing proliferation of illegal small arms and light weapons, and the national bodies had enabled seizure of illegal weapons.

He said Gabon had participated in a regional seminar on the implementation of the Programme of Action. Participants had stressed the need for technical assistance to establish data banks and techniques for tracing weapons. Without international cooperation, however, it would be difficult to curb the spread of illicit small arms and light weapons.

Mr. AL-MANDHRI (Oman) said the national coordination authority for weapons control in his country was the Oman Police, which was charged with guiding policies and research on the illicit training and use of weapons. The police also verified compliance with weapons regulations and evaluated the country's need for small arms and light weapons. The national focal point was the Department for Criminal Investigation, which also acted as a liaison with other countries in the struggle against illicit weapons.

He said that Oman acted through the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) on matters relating to legislation and administrative procedures for carrying out the effective monitoring of weapons, which was done according to the Arms and Ammunitions Law. The country had no production facilities for weapons, and was making every effort to combat the illicit small arms trade, as well as manage its weapons stockpiles and reserves.

OUSMAN BADJIE, Secretary of State for the Interior and Religious Affairs of the Gambia, said the difficulty and complexity of the fight to curb the proliferation of small arms called for a web of initiatives and approaches that would reduce the illegal and oversupply of those weapons.

He said that the Gambia, as a signatory to many international, regional and subregional protocols and conventions in that field, had made significant progress in the implementation of those instruments relating to international peace and security. The Gambia would work in concert with the international community to foster common dialogue and understanding in the area of small arms, where it had already recorded some achievements to implement the Programme of Action, including the recent establishment of a National Commission to monitor the illicit small arms trade.

The small arms threat could not be effectively addressed without adequately dealing with the supply side of the small arms equation, he said. Substantive action needed to follow the “rhetoric of concern”. He would submit a detailed report on national implementation to the meeting.

ANDREW RWIGAMBA (Rwanda) said the cross-border proliferation of small arms and light weapons via non-State actors and other illegal means had been the major problem in his country’s subregion. The militia, which had caused the 1994 genocide in his country, was still roaming the countryside carrying large amounts of such weapons with the aim of completing unfinished business. The best efforts of the Government had not stopped them, nor had ongoing regional initiatives. A national focal point on arms had been established and a new constitution would strengthen gun-control legislation. The 2002 Pretoria Conference on Needs and Partnerships had coordinated African countries on implementing the 2001 Programme of Action. Efforts so far had not been enough. The problem must be viewed globally and from top down, and practical and decisive steps must be taken to help both regions and States.

In many countries, he said existing regulations and controls had been inadequate to stop the destabilizing flow of weapons through regions. Weaknesses in laws, licensing procedures, and enforcement mechanisms had been exacerbated by insufficient political will, inconsistent approaches, inadequate coordination and a lack of cooperation at all levels. There were wide variations in regulating arms manufacture, licensing and stockpiling of existing weapons. There were also differences in legal definitions and in systems for regulation, oversight, marking and minimum standards for record-keeping. In short, regional efforts had not addressed the global nature of the sources for small arms across the increasingly transnational networks of brokers, dealers, financiers and transporters.

The international community should urgently address the issue of insufficient resources for dealing with the problems of illicit arms trading, he urged. Arms manufacturers should be called upon to account for their actions and they should be sanctioned for a lack of accountability. The sale of any type of weapon to non-State actors should be strictly forbidden, and States providing assistance to those groups should be penalized. Finally, the ray of hope was that his country had the political will to deal with the regional problem.

MIGUEL GARBO (Ecuador) said that a national body had been established to monitor the manufacturing, exports, imports and distribution of small arms. The national media had been involved in the dissemination of information about procedures to be followed by manufacturing companies, and the Government was working towards full implementation of the Programme of Action. Sanctions were also in place to deal with illicit imports of small arms.

He said his country was party to a number of international and regional legal instruments relating to firearms. He also drew attention to the Andean Plan, which had been adopted by the Presidents of Andean countries. He urged international support for small countries like its own to deal with the problems of illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

ISAAC SOALADAOB (Palau) related that his country had drawn up its Constitution in 1979, with memories of war still on their minds. Some 180 days later, legislation had

been enacted to provide for the collection, confiscation and destruction of small arms and light weapons, as well as for penalties for the possession of such arms. Those penalties were still in effect for various reasons, including that, in the 1980s, small arms and light weapons had been used to intimidate or injure political leaders.

Palau had used an amnesty programme for weapons collection, he continued. For a certain period of time, citizens could voluntarily hand over arms without penalty. The programme had been successful, leading to the collection of a large number of weapons. The country seemed to be “ahead of the game”, but people would still be subjected to victimization until all arms had been destroyed. The full eradication of illicit arms must be addressed on both the regional and international levels.

NDUKU BOOTO (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that her Government was convinced that implementation of the Programme of Action was an important factor in the promotion of peace and security. Her country had realized the impact of small arms and light weapons, as a result of the years of conflict, which had victimized mainly women and children. Also, child soldiers had been forced into conflict. She stressed that the conflict in her country had magnified the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

She said her Government had embarked upon the search for peace, resulting in the recent signing of a peace agreement and the establishment of transitional Government. At the regional level, the Democratic Republic of the Congo had been negotiating agreements to counter the illicit small arms and light weapons trade. It had also set up a national body to monitor and coordinate activities to deal with the small arms menace.

REVAZ ADAMIA (Georgia) said his country’s experience had highlighted the importance of stockpile management and security for small arms and light weapons. That experience had been governed by major change in the region — namely, the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Georgia now faced several challenges related to the control of small arms and light weapons. For one, three Russian military bases remained in the country, which were specifically connected to the illicit, uncontrolled spread of small arms and light weapons. Those bases did not come under the effective control of their central command, and had been turned into major sources of arms for different secessionist, criminal and terrorist groups.

He cited as another challenge the country faced, the existence of two post-conflict territories in the country — Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, which were beyond the control of the central Government. In addition, Georgia was situated in a volatile region rich in conflicts and paramilitary groups, leading to a high demand for all kinds of armaments, primarily small arms and light weapons. In attempting to remedy the small arms problems Georgia faced, it would need assistance, among other things, in: stockpile management and security; financial support for small arms collection and destruction programmes, especially vital in and around the conflict zones; assistance in border/customs control; assistance in capacity-building of different law enforcement and special services; and assistance in the peaceful resolution of conflicts in the region.

Exercise of Right of Reply

The representative of the United States said Cuba's representative had made inappropriate and unacceptable charges against his Government. The Cuban charges were as preposterous, scurrilous and shocking as they were untrue. Many were here when terrorism came into the city a few miles from this floor. The United Nations had supported the fight against terrorism.

He said that the Cuban statement had diverted attention from the fact that, earlier this year, the Cuban Government had arrested a number of people, including writers and academics, who had been summarily tried and executed. That action had been condemned by a number of governments and civil society organizations. The Cuban Government's actions would not halt the desire of the Cuban people for freedom.

The representative of Cuba, also exercising his right of reply, said that he rejected the United States' statement. His own earlier statement had been relevant to the meeting. Cuba had never committed any terrorist acts, and had only used legitimate means in self-defence. The Cuban-American National Foundation, and other terrorist groups based in Miami, had acted with impunity from United States territory, and had used small arms and light weapons. He said that more than 3,000 Cubans had died from those terrorist acts, and 2,000 more had been disabled. Last year, his Government had proposed to the United States a programme for joint cooperation to combat terrorism, but the United States had rejected it.

Statements by Non-Governmental Organizations

FOLADE MUTOLA, of WINAD based in Trinidad and Tobago, introduced the statements to be made by non-governmental organizations. She said she spoke on behalf of the International Action Network on Small Arms, which represented the global movement against gun violence. It was a network of more than 500 civil society organizations working in 100 countries to stop the proliferation, reduce the demand and end the misuse of small arms and light weapons. She quoted the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) as stating that more than one million people across the world had lost their lives in incidents involving small arms and light weapons since the United Nations Conference on that issue in 2001. Each day, more than 1,000 people died from small arms.

She said that governments had created the problem of the "global flood" of small arms. Some governments had created the problem directly — by selling or giving away millions of new and surplus small arms, without regard for the consequences. Others had contributed to the problem indirectly, by maintaining the legislative and operational loopholes, which allowed those weapons to flow into the hands of despots, bandits, human rights abusers and other misusers. Governments bore responsibility for solving the problem. The International Network today sought to give voice to those people most directly affected by that crisis and to those who were working in diverse ways to be part of the solution.

She said the first of seven presentations to be made by NGO representatives would outline the human cost of small arms and the need to connect community and global action in the years to come.

CHAMILLA HEMMATHAGAMMA, of South Asia Partnership International based in Sri Lanka, spoke on community voices and actions, beginning with the impact of small

arms on public health. She noted that firearms were the leading cause of fatal injuries for South Africans over the age of 14 and that 28,000 people were killed by small arms each year in the United States. Firearms were also the primary cause of death of young men in Rio de Janeiro. An unknown percentage of the 200,000 people killed each year in countries not at war died from homicides, suicides or accidents. Moreover, small arms misuse interrupted health service delivery, with life-threatening consequences, including the depletion of local blood supplies, as well as the disruption of humanitarian aid.

As for the humanitarian impact, she said that, many of the world's estimated 20 million refugees and displaced people had been forced to move at the barrel of a gun, and continued to be threatened by guns during their flight. Regarding development, small arms availability and misuse prevented sustainable development and diverted foreign investment, while poverty often increased the demand for weapons. Vulnerable populations were also affected, with children suffering devastating consequences as both the victims and perpetrators in armed violence. The death and injury of primary caregivers often dramatically weakened family structures and led to the forced separation of children from their remaining family members.

Turning to the effect of small arms on women, she said they were shot, traumatized, intimidated, enslaved, robbed and raped at gunpoint each day in every part of the world. Women were not simply victims of conflict, but also participated as combatants or in support roles, providing information, food, clothing and shelter. Willingly or not, they bore the long-term burden of caring for the sick and injured. With adult male populations absent or greatly diminished, women often became the main providers for their families.

As for men, they were the overwhelming owners and users of small arms, and worldwide they were the majority of victims of gun violence, she continued. In some regions, owning and using a weapon was a measure of manhood. As long as men were unable to find positive, healthy, and non-violent ways to be men, all work to prevent small arms violence would be in vain. Actions by civil society over the past two years to combat the use of small arms had included: developing awareness-raising campaigns; mobilizing women in a targeted education campaign; strengthening gun laws and working with governments to develop gun-free zones; and participating in community-based weapons collection and destruction.

JOSEPH-VINCENT NTUDA EBODE, Foundation Paul Ango Ela pour la promotion de la geopolitique, spoke on the shutting down of loopholes and tightening of procedures in arms transfers. He referred to actions by a number of countries and regional groups, such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and to the ECOWAS moratorium on the importation, exportation and manufacture of small arms and light weapons, always of strengthening cooperation in tightening loopholes in the illicit small arms trade. He noted that some governments, for commercial reasons, had not taken the necessary steps to deal with abuses in their regulatory mechanisms to halt the illegal trade in small arms.

He said that only an international treaty would close the loopholes in illegal trade. One of the challenges was to determine the origin of the arms. Certain conditions were required, including appropriate markings and tracing. To ensure that weapons were delivered to their final destination, physical inspection and checks were necessary.

Non-governmental organizations had presented a model instrument on markings. The trade in small arms could be linked to other activities such as the drug trade and smuggling of minerals. It was up to governments to fill the gaps and tighten the loopholes. Looking to the next Biennial Meeting, he called on governments to tighten controls on private trade in small arms. He also proposed the tightening of brokerage rules, and a follow-up to United Nations markings proposals.

ANAYANCY ESPINOZA, of Arias Foundation based in Costa Rica, noted that some regional organizations had tightened criteria for weapons transfers, but such transfers had continued. Moreover, many exporters of small arms had developed new partnerships to promote increased trade in those weapons. She stressed that major States manufacturing weapons must strengthen their controls. Most of those nations had arsenals that could be exported to other countries, and they must ensure that weapons did not go to groups or individuals flouting international law.

Governments must call upon countries to ensure that licences were necessary for production or co-production, she continued. In many areas, illicit traffic was encouraged by authorized agencies. That occurred, for example, in areas of conflict where arsenals were weak and weapons moved easily from areas under embargo to other areas. Another problem with small arms arsenals was that they were easy to lose or steal. All countries must act responsibly with respect to the diversion of weapons to other nations, groups or individuals.

She said that end-use certificates and verification systems must be compulsory to prevent weapons from being diverted to terrorists or criminal groups. A group of NGOs was proposing an international treaty for the small arms trade based on the principle that weapons exporters should not send weapons to anyone violating international law. The international community could stem the flow of weapons to human rights abusers and warmongers.

CARLO PERONI, World Forum on the Future of Sport Shooting Activities, said that the organization played a particular role in the meeting because it essentially spoke for the vast majority of the world's citizens who might be most directly affected by the way the Programme of Action was implemented, or by future policies that might flow from related efforts. He said it would serve all parties well if some recognition was given to the World Forum's members, as well as to the legitimacy of hunting and sport shooting activities.

C. EDWARD ROW, Chairman of the World Forum on the Future of Sport Shooting Activities Manufacturers Advisory Group, reviewed the group's activities, particularly those of manufacturers, to fight illicit trafficking in small arms. He said it had endeavoured not only to participate in the overall development of policy, but to put into effect their own system of self-regulation.

He said the Forum had held six workshops on subjects related to small arms and firearms. It had recommended that relevant data be gathered on production and trade. It also encouraged cooperation, where appropriate, with other organizations. He called for the development of databases of import practices, and for an improvement of customs practices.

THOMAS MASON, Manufacturers Advisory Group, said that marking standards needed to be communicated to the world's manufacturers. He was in the process of compiling a directory of the world's firearm manufacturers, for which he was requesting assistance from the Member States. Specifically, he wanted information about additions, corrections, and deletions to the lists he was compiling.

KEITH TIDSWELL, Sporting Shooter Association of Australia, said the matter of private, lawful firearm ownership involved culture, tradition, and history. There was a danger of oversimplifying the problems associated with small arms and firearms. The United Nations Programme of Action should only concern itself with weapons of war. Moreover, the popular statistic of 500,000 deaths annually from firearms was incorrect and was actually much smaller. It was also true that genocide, the ultimate human rights abuse, could only occur against an unarmed population. The right of self-defence, therefore, must also be followed for people facing genocide.

JOHN MILLER, National Muzzle Loading Rifle Association of the United States, speaking also for the International Association of Museums of Arms and Military History, an affiliate of the International Council of Museums, said the military and arms museums of the world were a continuing resource of deep and impartial knowledge about the subject of small arms and light weapons, which governments could call upon. He called for the rejection of proposals that all surplus weapons be deactivated, even those held in museums.

Also speaking for the 1903 Civilian Marksmanship programme in the United States, he explained that that programme furnished surplus military arms to civilians for competition shooting events. There were proposals for the destruction of surplus military arms, but acceding to those requests would limit the supply of equipment and the range of activities that those groups had enjoyed.

TONY BERNADO, Executive Director of the Canadian Institute for Legislative Action, said that despite government propaganda to the contrary, best estimates were that as few as 50 per cent of Canadian firearms owners had licensed themselves or registered their firearms. Enactment of firearms laws had created a huge and growing "grey market".

SEM PENG SEAN, Oxfam, based Cambodia, said it was essential to understand the factors related to the demand for small arms. Acknowledging that the negative impact of guns was becoming better understood, he expressed regret that the Programme of Action mainly focused on regulating supply. It also barely referred to other important matters, such as restoring States' capacities after conflicts and building cultures of peace. Because it was necessary to emphasize the connection between security and development, donors should mainly support programmes that emphasized that connection, he said.

He highlighted some positive developments in the approaches being taken by governments, NGOs and international agencies to availability and demand. First, the attention to governance and law was important. In that regard, campaigns to increase awareness and transparency, ending impunity for human rights abusers, and promoting security sector reforms, were especially helpful. With respect to civil conflict, he lauded the idea of using local traditional approaches to conflict management and stressing non-violent social change. Regarding social and economic development, policies

aimed at reducing economic disparity and creating opportunities for youth were key. Shifting cultural identity and attitudes towards gun possession was another positive development.

MARK GREGORIAN, Institute for War and Peace Reporting in Armenia, spoke about ending the misuse of small arms and light weapons. He said it was disappointing that “misuse” had been deleted from several paragraphs of the draft United Nations Programme of Action. Uncontrolled small arms greatly increased their use by criminals. Small arms were easily available and misused in conflict areas. They were also responsible for human rights abuses by governments and non-State actors. Government forces sometimes used small arms to carry out atrocities. Governments must impose strict laws to govern the use of force to build trust among civil society.

He also urged governments to take strong measures to halt and prevent the misuse of weapons. They must, among other things, apply strict norms of discipline and accountability on the use of arms by all security agencies. They must also stop all recruitment, training and use of children under the age of 18 for military service, as well as ensure their disarmament, demobilization and social rehabilitation.

JOSEPH MULUPI, Saferworld, Kenya, said the inclusion of civil society organizations in the national commissions greatly increased the chances for effective implementation of the Programme of Action. First, however, States had to establish those commissions. Currently, only 37 had done so. Declaring that some countries had found it helpful to develop national action plans based on their assessments of their individual small arms problems, he said other countries would be wise to follow their example.

In developing such national action plans, he said it was essential to foster cooperation between government and civil society. Government officials, after all, often had only partial understandings of the issues at hand and, therefore, could benefit from the research of civil society institutions. Such cooperation was currently under way in Kenya, United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, and Mozambique.

ATEF ODIBAT, Regional Human Rights Security Centre of Jordan, also advocated information exchange between governments, NGOs and civil society groups. In that regard, consensus-building was a crucial issue in the implementation of the Programme of Action. It had become clear that, during the development of the Programme of Action, civil society organizations had to be involved, as their participation was crucial for effective implementation. Such organizations could monitor governments’ actions and make sure they were complying with their commitments. Recognizing the sensitive issues involved with the tracking of weapons, he said it was important to overcome the suspicion between governments and civil society in that area.

REBECCA PETERS, International Action Network on Small Arms, summing up the presentations by the NGOs, urged States to adopt strict arms export criteria that were based on the observance of human rights and compliance with international humanitarian law. States must develop and strengthen regional codes of conduct, which should be made binding. She also called for a binding international instrument on arms transfers, and for the development of an international regime for the standardization, authentication, verification and continued monitoring of end-user commitments.

She said that additional mechanisms must be created to hold governments accountable for their misuse of small arms and for their failure to prevent that misuse. The root causes for the demand of small arms should also be considered. Civil society must be engaged in the process of developing national action plans, and regional and international norms. Civil society should be involved as a legitimate actor in the whole process of developing practical and sustainable responses to the small arms problems. It was also vital for the international community to take concerted action now to tackle proliferation.

Response of Member States

FRED BEYENDEZA (Uganda), responding to a Costa Rican speaker who had accused Uganda of receiving arms from Romania in 2001 and using them to create chaos in the subregion, stressed that those charges were false, adding that Ugandan soldiers were known for their discipline.

He also criticized the insinuations that using child soldiers was official Ugandan policy. On the contrary, his Government was on record for opposing the idea of child soldiers, and it had publicly condemned rebels in the northern part of the country who had abducted children and used them as sex slaves and soldiers.

Mr. FIANZA (Philippines) took the floor to respond to the statement made on behalf of the Arias Foundation. Specifically, he insisted that assistance from the United States would only be used to fight terrorism. Furthermore, his Government adhered to all major international human rights instruments. He urged delegates and participants to stick to the issue at hand, namely, small arms.

ROBERT MCDOUGALL (Canada) said several references had been made to his Government's firearms registration programme. Therefore, he called attention to a document at the door, which contained statistics, for those who were interested. He added that he would like to explore how civil society groups could be better brought into all consultations.

LUIS ALFONSO DE ALBA (Mexico) thanked the civil society representatives for their contribution, adding that his delegation would take note of their comments. He agreed with the representative of Canada that there should be more opportunities for increased participation by civil society and NGOs in their joint endeavour.

STAGNO UGARTE (Costa Rica) said his country was pleased that the meeting had afforded an opportunity to civil society groups to make their contributions. He also supported the Canadian proposal that NGOs should be broadly included in future meetings.

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