

**United Nations Conference to Review Progress
Made in 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
30 June 2006**

Statement by Herman Suter
PROTELL (Switzerland)

Mr President, distinguished delegates,

I am Hermann Suter and I speak for the lawful firearms owners of Switzerland through the Swiss organization Pro Tell. It is my task to comment on some implications in the President's Non-Paper.

In it, Mr President, we learn that enforcement of the Programme of Action is to involve pressure on those States which do not actively participate in the implementation process. It should be said that our organization has no argument with reasonable means being agreed to reduce the illicit transfers of military arms, and the application of marking and tracing regulations.

However, the lobbying that has been done by NGOs relies heavily on the premise that in order to fight global poverty and hardship (especially in developing countries), it is first necessary to register, prohibit, cease production of and to destroy small and light weapons wherever they are found. They believe that, lacking such a measure, development aid for long-term stability and acceptable living conditions is fruitless, and hence real progress towards world peace cannot be achieved. We Swiss would assert, Mr. President, that it is precisely because of our civilian armaments that in World War II our country went unplundered and we survived a terrible time in history in exactly that peace.

Unfortunately, according to some influential lobby groups, it suffices to prohibit and destroy small arms and light weapons in order to ensure the chances of lasting foreign aid in the battle against hunger and poverty and the progress to peace. The premise is well-meant. Any valid effort to stop or reduce injustice and violence deserves our support. This formula, however, Mr. President, amounts to no more than over-simplification and public relations hopefulness.

These issues are not resolved or even assisted by the blanket prohibition of privately-owned firearms. Such prohibition is the wrong answer to the real causes. It is surface polishing and fighting symptoms. The anti-gun NGO approach offers no solution. Quite the contrary: it invests precious human and financial resources in the wrong places and hinders people from shaping an informed opinion on the real problems.

Indeed, Mr. President, after more than a decade of increasingly restrictive legislation against lawfully-held guns, country by country, a change is taking place as policymakers realize the pendulum has swung too far. Accordingly, the Swiss people have recently joined a number of other countries – Canada, New Zealand, Brazil – in rejecting measures such as the mandatory registration of longarms, in the growing awareness that these approaches are not cost-effective and do not reduce crime. Indeed, Switzerland has had very few restrictions on private, lawful gun ownership. There are shooting ranges attached to cities and towns the length and breadth of the country, with children encouraged to participate, and our crime rates are among the lowest in the developed world.

Prohibitions and ever-increasing restrictions on small arms as demanded by the International Action Network on Small Arms punish the wrong people. We Swiss Switzerland reject their demands, and say that those who profit from them are rogue governments. In its well-known history of neutrality, Mr. President, the well-armed people of Switzerland have

seem their country suffer no attack, unlike many of their neighbours, and they have possessed their arms in peace. Attempts at wholesale disarmament criminalize the innocent and open the door to more abuse.

If the general assembly should accept the drive towards blanket prohibitive demands, Mr. President, it will be contrary to a growing body of study showing that in stable countries, arms prohibition does not work to lower criminal abuse.

There is a danger the UN will lose further trust and credibility around the globe, and ultimately take part in the prolongation of poverty, misery and the lack of prospect of entire peoples, by mistakenly directing its attention towards private gun ownership.