Statement by

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at 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

New York, 7 – 11 July, 2003
Madame Chairperson,

Allow me to express on behalf of my delegation our sincere congratulations to you on your assumption of the chairmanship of this important 1st Biennial Meeting of States on a subject that is of utmost concern to all of us. We have no doubt that you will guide our deliberations to a successful conclusion and you can count on our support and cooperation in this regard.

Madame Chairperson,

Botswana aspires among others to be a safe and secure nation by 2016. The Government of Botswana, therefore, remains committed to doing everything in its power to implement all international instruments aimed at controlling the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Botswana recognizes the deadly impact that such weapons have on the country’s security, economic progress and sustainable development. It is for this reason that we are grateful for our participation at this United Nations Biennial Meeting of States which aims to review progress at the National, Regional and Global levels to implement the United Nations Programme of Action (UNPOA) to prevent, combat and eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects which was adopted by the U.N. in 2001.

Botswana has made significant strides in her endeavour and commitment to implement the Programme of Action.

Madame Chairperson,

At the national level, the Commissioner of the Botswana Police Service who, in terms of section 3(i) of the Arms and Ammunition Act Chapter 24:01 of Botswana Laws, is the Administrator of the Act, has been appointed the National Point of Contact effective 2001 and thus, acts as liaison between states on firearm matters.

A 13-member National Coordination Agency has been established drawing membership from the Botswana Police Service, the Botswana Defence Force, the Attorney-General's Chambers, Office of the President, Department of Immigration, Department of Customs and Excise, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, and the Department of Mines. Its inaugural meeting was held on 24th April, 2002.

One of the Agency’s major activities was the organization of the First National Consultative Conference on Firearms Control, Ownership and Administration in Botswana, with the theme “Towards a Safe and Secure Nation”, which took place at the Grand Palm Hotel in Gaborone from 13 to 15 May, 2003. The main purpose of the conference was to commence nationwide consultations for the development of more effective measures and sound strategies for the long term control of firearms and for the enhancement of public safety and security in Botswana.

The consultative conference was organized with the support and participation of the Botswana Civil Society through the Botswana Council of Non-Governmental Organizations (BOCONGO), Safer World and Safer Africa, and which provided the technical and material assistance. The proceedings of this most successful conference is presented to this meeting and accordingly, we request the U.N. Secretariat to distribute the report of the First Consultative Conference on Firearm Control, Ownership and Administration in Botswana “towards a Safe and Secure Nation” for use as reference material.

The National Focal Point will now proceed to implement the following Conference recommendations which are that:

- The Government and civil society should work together to effectively create and implement a National Plan of Action on small Arms and Light Weapons Management in Botswana that takes into account all the existing regional and international protocols and initiatives on small arms proliferation issues. This National Plan will guide the development of a national policy on firearms and all the recommendations that emerged during the Conference as indicated in the Summary of Proceedings, from page 19 to 27 of the report.
- The National Focal Point should be expanded to include representatives of civil society as an integral part of the Focal Point. This will maximize consultation and cooperation between governmental agencies and civil society organizations
in pursuit of all actions supporting the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the National Plan of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons Management.

- The review of the Firearms and Ammunition Act should be undertaken taking into account the concerns raised at the Conference and in broad consultation with civil society as appropriate.
- Civil society organizations, including Non-Governmental Organizations, community based organizations, professional and religious associations, private sector, and academic institutions, among others, should strive to improve their interactions with each other and to institute a common civil society forum for the discussion of joint activities, actions and concerns.

Overall, it was the understanding of the Conference that the future prosperity of Botswana is inextricably intertwined with a responsible and cooperative partnership between the civil society and Government. This relationship is necessary for the effective implementation of policies and laws designed to prevent, manage and resolve the problems associated with the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

Madam Chairperson,

In terms of the Finance and Audit Act Chapter 54:01 of the Laws of Botswana, all Government Departments are required to maintain accurate inventory cards in respect of all firearms in their possession and control. The National Focal Point requires such Departments to submit to it returns of firearms in their possession twice a year or every six months.

A total of 3,185 (three thousand and one hundred eight five) firearms, mostly confiscated through court processes and some surrendered or found, have been destroyed from 2002 to date. In this connection, the British Government has kindly donated to Botswana a Firearms Destruction Machine for which we are most grateful.

Botswana Government, through the Botswana Police Service Central Arms Registry, maintains and keeps all firearm records manually. Regrettably, this situation is not going to improve in both short and long term since our plans to computerize them could not materialize due to budget constraints since these provisions could not be accommodated in our National Development Plan 9 (2003 – 2009). It is at this juncture that I will appeal to the International Community to assist us to computerize our Small Arms and Light Weapons stocks.

The Arms and Ammunition Act, Chapter 24:01 of the Laws of Botswana has been audited and found not to provide for all the controls envisaged by the various International Legal Instruments, including the UNPOA. Thus, it was found necessary to amend it not only to bring Botswana in line with her international obligations, but also to create a more strengthened and effective gun control legislation. Therefore, the Cabinet on 24th July, 2002 directed that the Act be amended to provide, for among others:

- Brokering as an offence.
- Statutory provisions relating to marking of Firearms at production stage.
- Total prohibition of possession and use of light weapons by civilians;
- Compliance with International Legal Instrument in firearms control that Botswana is a party to.

At Sub-regional level, Botswana is party to the SADC Protocol on the Control of Firearms, Ammunition and other related materials in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Region which Botswana signed and ratified in 2001.

Through the Botswana Police Service, Botswana is actively involved in the implementation of the Action Plan on the implementation of the SADC Protocol by the Southern African Regional Police Chiefs Cooperation Organization (SARPCCO).

In conclusion, it is my pleasure to once again re-assure this gathering of Botswana's commitment towards ensuring a gun free world in collaboration with all the interested partners and stakeholders. At the same time as we sit in this conference, we are listening with interest at what control measures exporting countries have or plan to have to ensure that these weapons do not end up in wrong hands.