"Let me at the outset express my delegation's appreciation to the delegation of the Netherlands for organizing this important debate on small arms. The holding of this debate during the Netherlands presidency of the Council reflects the importance the Government of the friendly Kingdom of the Netherlands attaches to the subject. We congratulate you, Sir, for convening this meeting.

The widespread availability of small arms is a major cause of concern for my delegation. Small arms and light weapons have a serious destabilizing effect on societies. In the African continent, which presently is replete with conflicts, the availability of small arms and light weapons exacerbates and fuels conflict. In societies where there are social problems, poverty and crime the availability of small arms contributes to those problems through their negative impact in terms of their psychological, physical and social consequences.

The problem of small arms and light weapons poses complex challenges which cut across all levels of society and relate not only to inter-State or intra-State conflicts but also include banditry and crime. For societies that are experiencing conflict or are emerging from conflict situations, the availability of small arms and light weapons poses an even bigger challenge.
We believe the cold war is over. The supply of arms as a conflict-management device is no longer acceptable. My delegation recognizes the close linkage between the proliferation of small arms and international peace and security. We recognize also the interrelationship between international peace and security, and sustainable development. We in Africa need sustainable development: we therefore need peace and security, and hence less proliferation of the millions of small arms in which our continent is awash.

The challenges posed by the problem of the proliferation of small arms cannot be addressed by individual Governments alone, least of all those of countries in regions of conflict. The problem of proliferation transcends national and regional levels and must therefore be tackled through international and global cooperation.

This is not to suggest that local efforts are not necessary: of course they are. In our view, local efforts are central to curbing the problem. Such efforts may include buy-back programmes; collection and disposal; and effective disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants in societies emerging out of conflict. Recently, a ceremony of that nature took place in Liberia, at which more than 20,000 small arms were incinerated. I hope that this practice continues and, in addition, that it is monitored, so that the results can prove permanent.

Because of the magnitude of the problem, an international process - or processes - is necessary to reinforce local, national or regional processes. It is necessary that international norms should be developed to address the problem. We in West Africa, aware of the problem that the proliferation of small arms has presented for our subregion, have adopted - at the conference of the heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of West African States held in Abuja, on 30 October 1998 - a moratorium on the production of and trade in small arms.
Since the end of the cold war, there has been remarkable progress towards the development of a comprehensive global framework for action against small-arms proliferation. I crave members' indulgence to mention a few.

At the United Nations level, the General Assembly has adopted resolutions which focus on the potential destabilizing effects of arms accumulation and transfers, their possible impact on socio-economic development and illicit trafficking thereof. The "Supplement to an Agenda for Peace" also makes a case for microdisarmament. The United Nations Group of Governmental Experts on Small Arms also contributed significantly to the efforts of the General Assembly.

It is also noteworthy to highlight that a range of United Nations and other global bodies have been developing programmes to tackle this issue. The Economic and Social Council -through the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice - the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) are all engaged in this issue in one way or another.

At the regional level, the ECOWAS Moratorium is a good example. Other regional organizations, such as the European Union -through its Programme for Preventing and Combating Illicit Trafficking in Conventional Arms and the European Union Code of Conduct on Arms Exports - and the Organization of American States (OAS) - through its Inter-American Convention Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials - are finding ways to tackle the problem.

My delegation welcomes these initiatives. It is our view that any international effort designed to address the twin problems of illicit transfers and excessive accumulation should be encouraged. However, a coherent and coordinated approach is needed to address the
problem. As such, we welcome the initiative of the Secretary-General for coordinated action on small arms, which is designed to ensure a coherent and coordinated approach to the small-arms issue within the United Nations system.

We welcome the high priority accorded to the role of the United Nations in promoting better understanding of the direct and indirect consequences of the proliferation of small arms. It is our hope that, ultimately, international consensus will emerge for global action.

In order to effectively address the problem of the proliferation of small arms, measures for the promotion of social, economic and political conditions that provide safety for individuals and societies are indispensable. Coupled with such measures should be well-defined policies designed to improve domestic regulation, controls for production and transfers, measures to address illicit trade and measures to ensure removal of weapons from post-conflict situations. In this context, the Security Council has a special role to play in conflict and post-conflict situations. The Security Council could, in such situations, address the issues of proliferation in its interventions. Arms embargoes could also play a central role in helping to reduce proliferation. However, many such embargoes of the Council are more honoured in their breach than in their observance. The Security Council should therefore make constructive efforts to ensure the effectiveness of such embargoes. The leadership role of Canada on efforts to render more effective the sanctions against UNITA is therefore commendable and worthy of emulation.

One might argue rightly that all States have the right and responsibility to acquire arms for their defence needs. In the case of Africa, however, I might hasten to support the view of the Secretary-General in his report on Africa that our compelling development interests require that a minimum of our resources be diverted for military purposes. African States can help to diminish the large military expenditures by
implementing transparency and confidence-building measures in the military and security fields. We therefore support the proposal for African States to participate in the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and also welcome the recommendation for the establishment of regional registers.

We must, however, acknowledge that the responsibility in the case of Africa is two-pronged. While African States must get their priorities right, arms manufacturing countries, too, must exercise restraint in supplying arms to African States, particularly in regions of conflict.

In conclusion, while the efforts of the Council to lend its voice to the efforts to halt the excessive accumulation of and traffic in small arms is laudable, we wish to caution that the underlying sociological, economic and political causes of conflict must be addressed so as to create conditions of stability and thus reduce the need for arms and, consequently, for conflict.

In this context, we welcome the momentum generated by the Secretary-General's report on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa. It is our hope that the momentum generated by this report will not be lost and that recommendations contained therein will be implemented. We believe that it is in this spirit of solidarity that you, Sir, have decided to highlight this issue during your country's presidency, at this historic moment when the General Assembly is holding its last session of this millennium. History will positively judge the pertinence of the move undertaken by your country, the Netherlands, as you have always worked in this field in past decades to create an asylum for humanity against the cruelties and the pains that are created by man's own invention against the human race.