Mr. President,

On behalf of my delegation, I wish at the outset to echo the warm compliments paid to you by delegations that have spoken before me, on your election as President of the Conference. We count on your qualities as a diplomat and experience in the field of disarmament to guide the deliberations of this important Conference. I also wish to appreciate the presence of Ambassador Donowaki, whose quiet but effective chairmanship has ensured that the High-Level Segment remains on course.

Mr. President,

Small arms and light weapons, regarded as the weapons of choice, have in no small measure fuelled many civil wars around the world, over the last decade. It is distressing to learn that in that period alone, four million people, mostly civilians, perished and countless were injured, maimed or forced to leave their homes during conflicts fought primarily with small arms.

In Africa, we have witnessed the harsh effects of conflicts on regional peace; trends often perpetrated by non-state actors, given the easy availability of these weapons. The evidence, sadly, is one that often portrays the direct involvement and
support of sovereign governments in the acquisition of these conventional weapons by non-state actors. The phenomenon of child soldiers with its negative socio-economic effects, particularly on women, can hardly be over-emphasized.

Mr. President,

Having suffered the worst effects of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, African countries have taken a number of initiatives at the national, sub-regional and regional levels, to develop appropriate responses to this disturbing trend.

The Ghana Government, in recognition of the need to address the serious problems of arms proliferation in our sub-region, and the related issue, of the forced participation of children in armed conflict, jointly hosted in Accra with the Government of Canada last year, a sub-regional workshop aimed at building on the Mali Moratorium and establishing a framework to keep children out of conflict. This was followed by a similar meeting in Winnipeg hosted by the Canadian Government.

In Ghana, while we may have been spared domestic civil strife, we have had to grapple with the fall-outs from nearby conflicts, notably the proliferation of arms. Consequently, Government has had to confront criminal activity traceable directly to the easy availability of arms. Regulatory processes have been introduced that allowed limited amnesty for the voluntary surrender of arms illegally acquired, followed by vigorous exercises by the law enforcement agencies to search and seize weapons. Appropriate penalties have been imposed for any breaches of the law. In this connection, I am happy to disclose that 874 arms were destroyed on 9th July, by the Ghana Police Service at a public ceremony. At the same time, strenuous efforts are being made to streamline the activities of the National Firearms Registration Centre to enable it effectively monitor the circulation of arms in the country.

In West Africa, ECOWAS has adopted the ECOWAS Moratorium which covers the importation, exportation and manufacture of light weapons and a code of conduct governing its implementation. It is significant to point out that the UN Small Arms Panel, given the success of the Mali moratorium, recommended the adoption and
implementation of regional and sub-regional moratoria on the transfer and manufacture of small arms and light weapons.

Similar initiatives have been taken in Southern and Eastern Africa. These various sub-regional efforts culminated in the OAU-sponsored meeting of 1st December 2000, in Bamako Mali, where the member countries agreed on a Common African Position on the Illicit Proliferation, Circulation and Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons, which represents Africa's coordinated response to this challenge to its peace, security and development.

Mr. President,

At the global level, my delegation wishes to commend the UN for its role, particularly its steadfastness in keeping the issue of small arms and light weapons alive on its agenda and appreciates the preparations made so far for the Conference. My delegation takes this opportunity to acknowledge the very useful work done by the Preparatory Committee, whose balanced Draft Programme of Action has been presented to this Conference. The document should serve as a basis for concluding our work at this Meeting We congratulate Ambassador dos Santos on work well done.

All sections of society at all levels, governments, the private sector, NGOs as well as civil society must cooperate and support such efforts aimed at curbing this menace. In the context of international cooperation, the key role that the NGOs and civil society in general, have played not only in keeping the issue alive in various fora, but also in promoting creative and sustainable solutions to the problem, must be recognized:

Mr. President,

In conclusion, Ghana believes that the following are essential to contain the proliferation of small arms and light weapons:

i. Recognition of the links between the licit and illicit trade in arms and the need to strengthen legal controls and the manner in which they are enforced:
ii. The identification of elements necessary to improve the capacity of States to prevent the occurrence of the problem, namely marking of small arms, effective control over transfers, regulating, the activities of arms brokers, to mention a few. This requires the review of relevant laws, establishment of common standards for the registration of arms, and mobilizing support within the communities of manufacturing countries.

iii. Prohibition of civilians from possessing certain types of weapons, encouraging voluntary surrender of weapons, collecting and destroying post conflict cache of weapons.

iv. Collaboration at the sub-regional, continental and global levels in pursuit of agreed agenda through improved exchange of information and capacity among law enforcement and specialized agencies.

v. Greater emphasis on the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programmes in conflict zones, and adequate resources for carrying them through.

Finally, Mr. President, what remains is for us to muster the political will to agree on a practical programme of action. During the Millennium Summit, our political leaders not only expressed their concern but also made a commitment, to deal with the phenomenon, and we can do, no less than acquiesce in their decision by agreeing on an action-oriented and balanced outcome document of this Conference. This much we owe humankind, and we should not fail.

I thank you, Sir.