Lesotho

STATEMENT

BY

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TO THE

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE ILLICIT TRADE IN SMALL
ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS IN ALL ITS ASPECTS

9 JULY 2001 NEW YORK

Mr President;

I join the speakers that preceded me in congratulating you and other members of the bureau for assuming the Presidency of this historic Inter-Governmental Conference to deal with the destabilizing accumulation and spread of military style small arms and light weapons within the context of international security and disarmament. We look forward to working closely with you and you can count on the support of Lesotho as you steer the work of this Conference to a successful conclusion.

Mr President;

There can be no doubt that small arms and light weapons proliferation have become a priority issue for the international community. The convening of this milestone Conference is a clear realization that in a world in which various actors besides States are increasingly enjoying easy access to a wide variety of lethal weapons, we can no longer rely on traditional arms control and disarmament frameworks which are based on State centric' national security criteria. This Conference further aptly demonstrates the need to harness global trade's
consequent proportionate reduction of close customs controls on shipments, as well as the development of sophisticated means of re-directing and concealing goods through trans-shipment, money laundering and corruption. All those have contributed to making international trade in small arms and light weapons a profitable business, with the consequent militarization of various regions of the world, including Africa.

Mr President;

Africa has been particularly vulnerable to this scourge, hence we see the demilitarization of the region as essential not only for the much needed peace, but for the revival of civil society, for the reduction of poverty and for sustainable development. The achievement of those noble goals largely depends on disarmament, demobilization of forces and the re-integration of ex-combatants into productive civilian life (DDR). Above all, it depends on the elimination of the flow of illegal arms into the continent.

Mr President;

In my country, the spread of illegal firearms has made it difficult to build social peace in post authoritarian Lesotho by contributing to civil disorder involving deaths and destruction of property. These arms have also been widely used in armed robberies and stock theft, prompting Government to introduce a new gun control legislation. We are in the process of destroying some of the weapons which are considered unnecessary or redundant for use by the army including those arms which have been recovered from illegal owners. Other measures to curtail illegal arms flow include the establishment of a Counter Crime Unit to search for illegal weapons throughout the country and the requirement that members of the army only carry weapons when on deserving duty. We are also cooperating with SADC in elaborating a sub-regional firearms protocol,

Mr President;

The scourge of light weapons proliferation has many dimensions including societal or human security issues as well as inter-state security. The interlocking nature of the problem as well as the prevailing uncertainty about its scope and nature continue to
make it difficult for the international community to adopt adequate policies to combat small arms and fight weapons proliferation. Even though the impact of this scourge is felt more at the community level, the causes of the problem are more regional or global in nature and thus call for comprehensive national, regional and global solutions. It is thus important that this Conference adopts comprehensive measures that will have a positive impact on the lives of men, women and children whose lives have been negatively affected by the excessive accumulation of small arms and light weapons in their communities.

It is for this reason Mr President, that Lesotho commends Ambassador Dos Santos of Mozambique, Chairman of the Preparatory Committee, for diligently guiding the work of the Committee in elaborating and recommending a comprehensive approach on the Draft Programme of Action. This well balanced document which has been inspired by the Bamako Declaration and which has taken the views of all sides into account, is a good basis for elaborating comprehensive measures to tackle the problem of the proliferation, accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons and to address their debilitating social, economic, political and humanitarian impacts.

Mr President;

It is particularly important that the views of the countries most affected, especially in Africa, be given weight in the document. While we realize that there may be need to strengthen certain parts of the document, a wholesome revision and/or overall change to the content and structure of the document would be an unnecessary and unwelcome move which we should all guard against.

We attach great importance to demilitarization of Africa and thus support proposals to strengthen the DDR provisions. The need to control arms brokers by bringing them within the ambit of international law can not be overemphasized. This Conference should thus give clear guidance on the steps that need to be taken to pave the way for the elaboration of internationally binding legal instruments for the regulation of brokering, marking and identifying of lines of supply.

In conclusion, Mr President,
It is our sincere hope that States, Civil Society and NGOs will cease the unique opportunity offered by this Conference to establish strategic partnerships and alliances to work together to implement the Programme of Action and to bring an end to the vicious circle of insecurity and violence under which many communities in the world find themselves because of this scourge. The time to start is now, and with our collective strength, we can win this fight.