Mr. President

I am delighted to convey the sincere congratulations of the Nigerian delegation to you, Ambassador Reyes of Colombia, on your well-deserved election as President of this important United Nations Conference devoted to the pressing problem of Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. Similarly, I wish to extend our congratulations to the other members of the Bureau.

2. We must also commend the excellent work done by Ambassador Carlos Dos Santos of Mozambique in successfully managing the difficult negotiations during the three sessions of the Preparatory Committee of this Conference.

Mr. President

3. This Conference could not have been taking place at a more opportuned moment. The mere fact of its convening is an acknowledgement of the often devastating
impact of small arms and light weapons on the well being of many developing countries. It is also an affirmation of the desire of the international community to deal with the problem of the growing illicit trade in these weapons.

4. While it is acknowledged that small arms and light weapons, in themselves, do not start or lead to criminal activities and conflicts in which they are employed, their ready availability has, nonetheless, too frequently escalated these conflicts and aided the activities of criminal elements in many countries. Clearly, their proliferation and the illicit trade, estimated at 40 to 50 per cent of global trade of small arms, pose real threat to the economic and social development of many developing countries, especially in Africa.

5. There is no question that Africa is the most affected region when considering the devastation that small arms-aided conflicts have wreaked on communities, societies and states. In many instances, economies have been totally destroyed and reduced to a shambles, further compounding the poverty situation of our countries. Infrastructures have been laid waste, millions of people killed and wounded while thousands are internally displaced and many more turned into refugees.

6. The phenomenon of illicit accumulation and proliferation of small arms and light weapons must, therefore, be speedily and comprehensively tackled, in a coordinated manner, if societies at risk and developing countries in particular are to become integral and fully functioning entities of the global community of nations. This is especially necessary and urgent if the commitments made and the targets set last year during the United Nations Millennium Summit are to be kept and attained.

Mr. President

7. The international community must not fail to take cognizance of the correlation between instability and proliferation of small arms on the one hand and the incidence of poverty on the other. More often than not, these twin evils reinforce each other, further endangering the stability and worsening the critical economic and social situation of many developing countries. Nigeria firmly believes that there is need to put in place and implement effective programmes of poverty alleviation by concerned
national authorities if this situation is to be ameliorated.

8. Unfortunately, we note with dismay that the ability of these countries to meet the needs of their societies in this area is constrained by the lack of resources as a result of declining prices of their exports and commodities as well as declining Official Development Assistance- (ODA) and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows to them.

Mr. President

9. The excruciating debt overhang continues to bedevil our development efforts. My delegation is convinced that nothing short of its remission will provide the necessary relief and spur for the sustainable growth of our economies and the regeneration of the social and political environment in our countries. Such environment would prove to be infertile ground for ruinous conflicts and the proliferation and accumulation of illicit small arms and light weapons while conducing to the consolidation of peace and liberal democracy in Africa.

Mr. President

10. Even though the capacity of African states to manufacture small arms and light weapons is very much limited, the 'continent, unfortunately, is the recipient of large quantities of these weapons. In West Africa alone it is estimated that there are some 7 million of these deadly weapons. The incessant conflicts and wars in the continent have provided the perfect milieu in which illicit trade in small arms, in exchange for the natural resources of the continent, continues to thrive.

11. The disturbing and unwholesome 'barter' for small arms of Africa's natural resources, for example, the so-called 'blood diamonds', has provided lucrative opportunities for arms dealers and merchants of war. It has also made it easier for dissidents and rebel movements within the continent to start and sustain conflicts, often with devastating consequences on the population. Indeed, these "'weapons of mass destruction", as small arms have been aptly labeled by the UN Secretary-General, are the instruments of choice in the prosecution of these conflicts.

Mr. President
12. In recognition of the enormous suffering that Africa has experienced as a result of conflicts induced by small arms and, in keeping with my country’s firm commitment to the maintenance of the stability and socio-economic development of the region, Nigeria has taken practical measures, at various levels, aimed at addressing the problem of the proliferation of these weapons. At the national level, we have established the National Committee on Small Arms and Light Weapons (NCSALW) as the agency charged with dealing with the problem in all its aspects.

13. To draw attention to and raise public awareness of the dangers of illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons, we carried out on Thursday, 5 July, 2001, the public burning and destruction of seized small arms. This symbolic action is in conformity with the earlier decision to declare the first day of this Conference, the "Small Arms Destruction Day".

Mr. President

14. In conjunction with this symbolic act we continue to tighten our law enforcement and legal instruments in our determined bid to confront the menace of illegal trade in and accumulation of small arms. We are pleased that an optional "Protocol against Illicit Manufacturing and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition", to supplement the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, was recently adopted by the General Assembly. My country will sign and ratify this Protocol which will provide an international law enforcement mechanism for crime prevention and the prosecution of traffickers.

Mr. President

15. At the sub-regional level the problem of illicit accumulation of small arms and light weapons has continued to receive the deserved attention of the leaders of West Africa. In October 1998, the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS), adopted a Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Light Weapons in ECOWAS States. An operational framework, embodying associated measures, was later evolved for the Moratorium under the Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development (PCASED).
16. At the regional level, African countries are unified in their agreement that, to promote peace, security, stability and sustainable development, it is vital to address the problem of illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons. At their meeting in Bamako, Mali from 30 November to 1 December 2000, African Ministers adopted the Bamako Declaration on a common African position on the Illicit Proliferation, Circulation and Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons.

Mr. President

17. Appropriate policies and measures at the national and regional levels are integral, if not essential, to effective action against illicit trade in small arms. Regional cooperation and coordination of efforts are equally important in the prevention, management and reduction of small arms proliferation. There is an urgent need for the mobilization of adequate resources by the international community in support of these, often poor countries, and regions, as they struggle to carry out practical programmes to prevent and combat illicit trafficking in these weapons. We believe that enhanced technical cooperation at all levels will also be invaluable in dealing with this problem.

Mr. President

18. Nigeria and Africa have taken these initiatives and measures to underscore our awareness of the danger posed by small arms and light weapons and our determination to fully address the problem of illicit trafficking in these weapons in all its aspects. Recognising the global nature of the problem and the urgency for dealing with it, it is imperative that we develop and establish appropriate set of international norms and standards on the question of illicit trafficking in small arms. Such norms and standards, we believe, must also be underpinned by a workable international convention on the spread of small arms.

19. This important Conference, the first of its kind, must therefore agree on an effective international action programme to curb and prevent illicit trafficking and proliferation in small arms and light weapons. It is Nigeria's considered view that the Programme of Action, reflecting a strong international will, should reinforce and extend measures already taken at the national and regional levels. This Conference
cannot fail to lead the way and underscore, in an unambiguous manner, our collective determination to fight the scourge of illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. It is only by manifestly demonstrating this commitment that we can give hope for a fulfilling life to a vast number of peoples in the world.

20. I thank you.