STATEMENT

BY

SOUTH AFRICA

TO THE
FIRST BIENNIAL MEETING OF STATES
TO CONSIDER THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
UN PROGRAMME OF ACTION TO PREVENT,
COMBAT AND ERADICATE THE ILLICIT TRADE
IN SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS IN ALL
ITS ASPECTS

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Chairperson,

Allow me to join others in congratulating you on your assumption of the chair of this Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. My delegation looks forward to working with you during this meeting in the same co-operative spirit that has characterised the working relationship between Japan and South Africa on these issues.

This meeting, which takes place two years after the adoption of the UN Programme of Action, marks a time for reflection of what we as Member States have done at the national, regional and global levels in terms of our undertakings in that Programme.

During this time of reflection on what we have achieved, it is again sobering when one continues to receive reports of large numbers of small arms and light weapons circulating in Africa, fuelling conflicts throughout the continent. As Africans, we are however, launching initiatives to address this and it is our hope that the cease fires in certain areas will replicate themselves in others. As pointed out during the Security Council debate on the issue of small arms last year, in Africa, our New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) includes a Peace and Security Initiative that maps out the promotion on our continent of long term conditions for development and security. In this context, we collectively aim to build our continent’s capacity to manage these conflicts by strengthening our existing regional and sub-regional institutions to deal with conflict prevention, management and resolution; peacekeeping and peace enforcement; post-conflict reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction; as well as through combating the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

Chairperson,

South Africa believes that this meeting should provide the opportunity for us as Member States to identify, as a first priority, what level of implementation has been achieved at the respective national levels. What we believe will naturally crystallise from our discussions during this biennial meeting is where difficulties are being experienced in implementing undertakings in terms of the UN Programme of Action.

It will be a critical element of our analysis to see where we can identify those areas in which we are in a position to assist each other, particularly at the national level, to follow up on our undertakings to which we have committed ourselves at the regional and global levels.

As some of these areas are at the core of our efforts to combat the illicit small arms and light weapons trade in all its aspects, South Africa wishes to highlight some of these. These are, but are not limited to building capacities, marking and tracing, stockpile management, collection and destruction and enhancing cooperation.
Chairperson,

Since the adoption of the United Nations Programme of Action in July 2001, South Africa has initiated or has been involved in a number of activities aimed at preventing, combating and eradicating this illicit trade. The most important of these are detailed in our national report which is made available during this meeting.

As far as international developments are concerned, South Africa was particularly honoured to co-host the “African Conference on the Implementation of the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms: Needs and Partnerships” in Pretoria, South Africa during March 2002.

The general conference objective was to review the commitments made in the UN Programme of Action and to examine how countries from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and African countries could support the national, sub-regional and international undertakings in the implementation of the Programme of Action.

Chairperson,

At the regional level, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) adopted the Protocol on the Control of Firearms, Ammunition and Other Related Materials when it was signed at the SADC Summit of Heads of State and Government, held in Blantyre, Malawi from 12-14 August 2002.

South Africa deposited its instrument of ratification for the Protocol with the SADC Secretariat on 18 March 2003.

At the national level, legislation has been promulgated to, amongst others, control civilian firearm ownership and to regulate South Africa’s national system of arms transfers.

The South African Police Service (SAPS) has developed a Firearms Strategy and the implementation thereof focuses not only on particular policing or legislative aspects, but addresses the full spectrum of establishing effective firearm control in South Africa.

The Firearms Control Act of South Africa provides for the operational control of all legal firearms stocks in South Africa. Key elements of the Act are requirements in relation to competency, re-licensing of firearms, limitation on the number of firearms for self-defence, the categorisation of types of firearm ownership and strict control of state owned stocks.

Within the framework of South Africa’s broad arms control policies and in order to give the National Conventional Arms Control Committee (NCACC), which is a sub-committee consisting of Cabinet Ministers, statutory powers, the National Conventional Arms Control Act was drafted and subsequently promulgated on 1 May 2003. The Act contains the requirements that must be adhered in the processing of conventional arms transfers to, from and through South Africa.
Chairperson,

The South African Government maintains its position that all surplus, redundant, obsolete and confiscated small arms of a calibre 12.7 mm and below should be destroyed in order to prevent these from ending up in the illicit small arms trade.

South Africa’s National Defence Force and Police Service have therefore continued with their destruction of all surplus, redundant and confiscated small arms and light weapons. Since July 2001 to date the South African Police Service has destroyed 115 711 small arms. As was previously reported, the South African National Defence Force completed the destruction of 271 867 small arms and light weapons during May 2001.

Chairperson,

My delegation continues to believe that the UN Programme of Action presents a practical and implementable framework for concerted action for preventing, combating and eradicating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects. Yet we need to recognise that the strength of any chain depends on that of its weakens link, or links. This emphasises the need for us to identify where there are needs and where partnerships can be built.

Our discussions will no doubt result in the adoption of a procedural report. It is not our intention to revise the UN Programme of Action and shift the goal posts for those States who are in the early stages of implementing the agreed undertakings. However, we should all leave this meeting with a clearer sense of the challenges that still lie ahead of Member States in the implementation of the UN Programme of Action at the global, regional, but particularly at the national levels.

I thank you.