

BANGLADESH

STATEMENT

BY

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PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF BANGLADESH TO
THE UNITED NATIONS

AND

LEADER OF THE DELEGATION

AT

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

IN ALL ITS ASPECTS

NEW YORK, 9 JULY 2001

Mr. President,

More than 1300 deaths each day are caused by about 550 million small arms and light weapons circulating worldwide. Annually the number of death and injury resulting from these is much higher than that caused by the so-called weapons of mass destruction. This chilling statistics itself provides the most convincing rationale for the convening of this United Nations conference.

Today's International Herald Tribune in its front page depicts the gruesome story of small arms proliferation saying that all over the world, small, low-cost weapons are reaching private hands at an accelerating rate and thereby perpetuating the cycle of violence. It tells us of the mind-boggling reality in which automatic kalashnikovs are available in exchange of five cows.

With the changing nature of conflicts and violence, the relative importance of small arms and light weapons has increased manifold in sustaining and aggravating conflicts with devastating effects on the fabric of the society and economy around the world and, above all, jeopardizing seriously the human security. Recent statistics also show that small arms were the weapons of primary choice in 47 of 49 post cold war conflicts causing 90 per cent of the casualties. Children comprise a large part of the victims.

Majority of these arms originate in the countries of the North with most of their victims scattered in the developing world. Fitting perfectly in the demand-supply chain, they are sold, resold, perhaps stolen, diverted, and may be legally or illegally transferred many more times. At each of these points following manufacture, brokers, insurgents, terrorists, criminals, government officials or other organized groups intervene in the process - operating basically without any control worth the name. Societies around the world are affected by this menace in many different ways leading to different characteristics, scope and magnitude of the problem. This multifaceted nature of the problem obviously calls for a comprehensive approach in addressing it at

the global, regional, sub-regional, national and local levels. The fact that multiple actors are involved also points at the need for collective action.

The sheer number of small arms in circulation around the world facilitates the steady supply of weapons to illicit markets. Private citizens worldwide own as many small arms as do state security forces. If this cycle is to be broken, international standards and principles for the destruction of confiscated or surplus small arms and light weapons must be established. Regional initiatives in this area can generate global action.

Mr. President,

It is not difficult to understand the dynamic of demand and supply of small arms in conflict situations. However, it is now seen in some societies that even non-conflict situations spring enormous demand for these weapons. Again because of diversion and illegal transfers, some transit countries face large-scale illegal influx of these weapons. Although the human and material cost put them in the same bracket as the end-user countries, the particularities of their situation should be borne in mind. The phenomenal ease of communication brought about by globalisation has also been a factor in the uncontrolled spread of small arms. It is well known that organized groups have been

We support the need for reliable marking as a part of the manufacturing process as well as tracing, record keeping and building databases. States should put in place adequate laws, regulations and administrative procedures towards effective control over possession, stockpiling and transfer of small arms. Proper export control measures and end-user certificates are useful in tackling the problem in supply and demand side. Open destruction of illicit arms will raise awareness and build public confidence.

Bangladesh approaches the problem from her principled position against terrorism and disarmament. We believe that the issue of small arms and light weapons cannot be viewed in isolation of its peace and security perspective. Given the role of small arms in perpetuating the cycle of violence, we must focus on prevention. In this regard, I cannot overemphasize the importance of promoting the culture of peace and non-violence particularly in children through education and advocacy so that today's victims does not become tomorrow's perpetrators.

The United Nations through appropriate agencies could be of assistance to developing countries in establishing national and regional mechanisms for dissemination and sharing of information and experience. In particular to increase awareness, the United Nations Information Centres, in concert with civil society, can support government efforts in more energetic and widespread dissemination of laws and regulation on illegal possession of weapons.

Before concluding, allow me, Mr. President, to join other delegations in conveying our warmest congratulations to Ambassador Camillo Reyes of Colombia for his unanimous election as the President of this Conference. We have full trust in his ability, expertise and leadership. We also convey to you, Ambassador Donowaki of Japan, for presiding over our high-level segment of the general discussion and for your long-standing commitment to the subject of the Conference. Bangladesh would

also pay a rich tribute to the contribution made and leadership provided by Ambassador Carlos Dos Santos of Mozambique as the Chairman of the Preparatory Committee.

Today - with the opening of this Conference - we have commenced an important process which, we believe, would go a long way in arresting the problem of proliferation and misuse of small arms. We recognize the limitations under which the work must be taken forward in our intergovernmental process.

Let us make a beginning and try to achieve what is achievable.

Let the best not be the enemy of the good.

I thank you, Mr. President.