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STATEMENT

BY

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(MINISTER)

AT THE

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

NEW YORK, 7 JULY 2003
Madam Chairperson,

The problem of illicit trade in small arms and light weapons is of particular concern to Nigeria because it constitutes a major impediment to peace, stability, security and economic development of many developing countries especially in sub-Saharan Africa. For this reason, the Nigerian delegation fully supports the Programme of Action of the 2001 United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons. Nigeria believes that the full implementation of the Programme of Action by all States will help eradicate the illicit trade in small and light weapons. This will engender peace, security and socio-economic development of the African continent.

Based on this conviction, Nigeria has taken practical measures since the 2001 Conference to implement the Programme of Action. In 2001, the Nigerian Government established a National Committee on Small Arms and Light Weapons part of whose mandate are:

(a) To control the import and manufacture of all light weapons;
(b) To register and control the movement and use of legitimate stock of arms; and
(c) To detect and destroy all illicit and surplus weapons.

Since its establishment, the Committee has taken measures to sensitize all stakeholders involved in arms on the menace of illicit small arms and light weapons and has solicited their support and cooperation in the fight against it. It has established an arms register/data base where information on small arms is kept. The Committee has organised seminars and workshops for capacity building of members and other stakeholders in the fight against illicit small arms. It has also organised a national seminar on the promotion of culture of peace in the country. Emphasis is always given in its work to enlightenment campaigns at all levels of the Nigerian society in order to reduce propensity towards violence with small arms.

More importantly, the Committee has facilitated the collation and destruction of illicit small arms. It may be necessary to add in this regard that Nigeria has scheduled to carry out additional destruction of illicit small arms in the country on 9 July 2003. As part of its effort to reduce illicit circulation of small arms in the country, the Nigerian authorities recovered a total of 1902 illicit small arms and 13,271 rounds of live ammunition between January 2002 and June 2003.

Nigeria operates a strict firearms regime in order to keep illicit small arms out of circulation in the country. By Nigeria’s Firearms Control Act, possession or acquisition of firearms for personal use requires approval from the highest authority. This effort is extended to the borders. Through regular joint border
patrol with her neighbours, Nigeria tries to keep trace of the influx of illicit small arms into country, and had sometimes succeeded in arresting and prosecuting some of the trans-border traffickers. Nigeria cooperates with the police from other West African countries in tracing the movement of illicit arms across borders through the Interpol Bureau in West Africa in which she has strong representation.

In 2001, Nigeria joined other Member countries of ECOWAS in renewing, for a three-year period, the current Moratorium on the importation, exportation and manufacturing of small arms and light weapons in West Africa. The Nigerian National Committee on Small Arms and Light Weapons maintains a strong relationship with ECOWAS Executive Secretariat in implementing the Moratorium. Nigeria has been steadfast in her respect for the Moratorium by ensuring that legal importation of small arms for Nigerian arms-bearing services are processed through ECOWAS Executive Secretariat.

Last year, Nigeria co-sponsored the African Conference on the Implementation of the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms: Needs and Partnerships with eleven other countries which took place from 18 - 21 March 2002 in Pretoria. The objective of the Conference was to re-emphasise commitments in the Programme of Action and those compatible elements of the 2000 Bamako Ministerial Declaration, and how national, sub-regional and international implementation processes can be supported by OECD countries and African countries.

Nigeria participated at high level in the Networking Seminar for National Commissions held in Banjul (The Gambia) from 4 - 5 June 2003 which reviewed the programme implementation of various National Commissions in West Africa as well as their various methods of resource mobilisation and preparation of good project proposals. Nigeria will host the next Networking Seminar for National Commissions in 2004.

Madam Chairperson,

Efforts by the Nigerian Government to implement the Programme of Action have been largely successful. These efforts have, however, been hampered by serious difficulties and problems in most of the other areas. Nigeria faces mounting problems of monitoring the influx of small arms into the country due to lack of modern surveillance equipment as well as appropriate screeners and scanners. Illicit small arms and light weapons from ex-combatants around the sub-region often find ready market in the country through the borders. Cooperation in providing these equipments will certainly enhance the efficiency of those entrusted with this important task in bringing more fruitful results.
The Nigerian National Committee on Small Arms and Light Weapons would need cooperation in terms of resources to enable it execute its proposed Arms for Development Project. By this project, the Committee intends to eliminate circulation of the illicit small arms in the country. The Committee will be prepared to discuss details of the Project with prospective partners. The Committee will also require technical cooperation with respect to a new equipment for destruction of recovered illicit arms. Staff training and data bank/arms register are other areas of cooperation and partnership that the National Committee is willing to explore.