

“Conference on the Implementation, by the Arab States, of the UN Programme of Action on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons”

**Organized by the United Nations in co-operation
with the League of Arab States**

Cairo, Egypt, 16-18 December 2003

Co-Chairs’ Summary

Introduction:

- 1- The Conference on the Implementation, by the Arab States, of the United Nations Programme of Action on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons met from 16 to 18 December 2003 at the headquarters of the League of Arab States in Cairo, Egypt. It was organized by the United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs in cooperation with the Department for Disarmament of the League of Arab States and with the generous support from the governments of Germany and Norway.
- 2- Twenty-one Arab States participated in the conference: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Also attending were delegates from the following interested countries: Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Russian Federation, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Several Departments and Agencies of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, as well as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the International Committee of the Red Cross, non-governmental and civil society organizations also attended the conference.
- 3- This Summary was prepared by the Co-Chairs of the Conference, Mr. Wael Al-Assad, Director, Department of Disarmament Affairs of the League of Arab States and Ms. Agnès Marcaillou, Chief, Regional Disarmament Branch of the United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs. This Summary, without prejudice to the national positions of Member States, is the sole responsibility of the co-chairs and does not include every issue discussed.

Day One

- 4- United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, H.E. Nobuyasu Abe, and Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, H.E. Amre Moussa, opened the conference. Their opening statements welcomed the conference as a first in the ongoing cooperation between the United Nations and the League of

Arab States in the area of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and stressed the importance of addressing the UN Programme of Action on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects by Member States of the Arab League.

- 5- Throughout the Conference, it appeared that many States in the Arab region had already taken steps to implement the Programme of Action at the national and regional levels. Furthermore, the discussion allowed for a fruitful exchange of views and experiences on ways to tackle the many challenges posed by the complex and multi-dimensional nature of the SALW issue. Capacity-building and cooperation were deemed important elements of progress in this endeavour.
- 6- In the first thematic session, the discussions focused on **National Capacity Building**, including **National Challenges and National Responses**.
- 7- Conference participants noted that, for Arab States, the challenges and responses differed according to the nature and extent of the small arms problem they encountered. Particular difficulties were faced by States which had recently emerged from conflict or were presently confronted with civil strife and instability. Moreover, the situation in one part of the Arab region was linked to that in another. Even States that strictly regulated small arms, at all levels, could see their efforts undermined by inadequate control measures in other countries.
- 8- At the national level, States were challenged by the complex and multi-dimensional nature of the small arms issue. One key challenge was effective policing, including the policing and control of borders. Another was the development and effective implementation of legislation covering the various aspects of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.
- 9- Legislations and regulations are already in place in many countries. Yet, legislative challenges include the areas of production, marking, stockpiles, civilian possession and illicit brokering. Conference participants heard that efforts to meet this challenge were well advanced in many parts of the Arab region as laws and regulations were amended and extended in light of evolving experience and conditions. The need to tackle the demand for small arms through education, awareness-raising, security sector reform and good governance was also raised by representatives of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.
- 10- Building adequate capacity for implementation of the UN Programme of Action in the Arab region was another key topic of discussion. The needs for financial resources, equipment, expertise and training were all mentioned in this regard.
- 11- Arab States are designating National Points of Contact in ever greater numbers, as provided for in the Programme of Action. Some Arab States are now moving to the next critical step in Programme implementation, namely the establishment of National Coordination Agencies. The latter bodies are especially important for implementing the Programme, since they bring together a broad range of governmental

stakeholders. It was also noted that National Coordination Agencies were a necessary mechanism for government agencies to address national challenges in an integrated manner. The importance of establishing a regional point of contact within the League of Arab States was highlighted.

12- The importance of national reporting on Programme implementation was another theme. It was stressed that the structures needed for reporting on the national implementation of the Programme of Action were the same structures needed for actual implementation.

13- In this session and throughout the Conference, participants emphasized that national efforts, while essential to address the small arms problem, were not sufficient, and needed to be complemented by cooperation at the regional and global levels involving the full range of actors engaged in this issue.

14- The afternoon session was devoted to **Effective Partnerships and Synergies**.

15- Participants heard a presentation on the work of the Group of Interested States. This open-ended informal group of States, chaired by Germany, meets in New York on a regular basis to examine project proposals submitted for financial and other types of assistance.

16- The session also focused on the important contributions that regional and international organizations and arrangements could make in supporting the UN Programme implementation by Arab countries. The benefits of interaction between different organizations was also highlighted (for example, the Group of Interested States and the League of Arab States).

17- The session continued with presentations on the Partnership with Civil Society and the Role of NGOs in Assistance & Support, including Raising Public Awareness and Mobilizing Public Opinion and Disarmament Education.

18- Participants noted that the Conference itself was a manifestation of the increasingly close cooperation between States, international organizations and civil society on the small arms issue. It followed a meeting of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Network of civil society organizations in Sana'a, Yemen, which included the participation of the Government of Yemen.

19- The important role that civil society organizations have to play in raising awareness and educating citizens and local communities on small arms issues was highlighted during the session, as was the contribution that NGOs could make in linking small arms and development. In peace-building and promoting development, it was also important to train teachers and future trainers. In these areas and others, NGOs had a crucial role to play in strengthening the dialogue between government and civil society. This was especially important where gaps had to be bridged

between the modern state and traditional attitudes and ways of life at the community level - specifically in relation to the illegal possession of weapons by civilians.

20- The need to involve all parts of the population in the fight against illicit small arms was stressed. This meant, above all, women who, it was noted, often constituted more than fifty percent of the population in post-conflict societies. Participants noted that NGOs could also bring valuable expertise and experience to National Coordination Agencies when involved in these bodies, as already seen in some countries.

Day Two

21- On the second day, the Conference addressed **Regional Capacity Building and Regional Cooperation and Assistance**. After having identified Regional Issues and the Regional Impact of International Issues, the speakers discussed Regional Measures.

22- The importance of cooperative arrangements for effective border management and policing was stressed, even though Arab States have expended considerable effort to control their borders thereby combatting the illicit trafficking of small arms. Several participants noted that the long, sparsely populated borders shared by many States made this more difficult. While effective customs cooperation was in place between many Arab States, there was a need to increase effective bilateral and multilateral cooperation in this important area.

23- Another key theme of this session was transparency and information sharing. It was noted that the enhanced sharing of information would contribute to building confidence within and among Arab States and would also contribute to more positive perceptions of security throughout the region and beyond.

24- On the issue of Marking, Tracing and Record-keeping, and Illicit Brokering, considered as international issues with regional impact, it was noted that the United Nations General Assembly was currently in the process of adopting resolutions that mandated specific activities to be undertaken in these fields.

25- The speakers explained how, in each of these areas, interested states were building upon existing provisions of the UN Programme of Action. It was understood that these new initiatives would balance the many legitimate uses of small arms—including for national self-defense—with the need to close important gaps in international control measures.

26- The morning session ended with presentations on **Existing Regional Mechanisms** and **Sub-Regional Information Networks**.

27- The speakers described the various initiatives undertaken by the Council of Arab Ministers of Interior on small arms-related matters, also mentioning the Council's

determination, expressed at its recent meeting in 2003, to build on progress made in recent years to enhance regional coordination in this area.

- 28- Although some regional measures existed, participants noted that enforcement was often made difficult by long borders and insufficient capacity in many Arab countries. There was a need to step up region-wide cooperation and coordination on such issues as border management and information exchange. Such coordination could involve the National Points of Contact and National Coordination Agencies, the League of Arab States and other regional and international organizations.
- 29- As an initial step, information could be exchanged on national laws and national experience in tackling the small arms problem within the Arab region. The importance of existing measures for information sharing within the Gulf Cooperation Council was also highlighted.
- 30- The session continued with the issue of **Regional Cooperation and Assistance**, including lessons learned from the experience of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the South Eastern Europe Small Arms Clearing House (SEESAC). The speakers explained the useful role of regional organizations and regional clearing houses in contributing to their respective regions from a political, diplomatic and operational standpoint. The support that the United Nations could provide to regional arrangements through the strengthening of cooperation was also emphasized.
- 31- The nature and extent of the small arms problem varies considerably in different parts of the world. Each region has its own specificity, creating the need for measures that are tailored to regional circumstances and involve relevant regional organizations. Nevertheless, this session illustrated the many ways that particular regions and organizations could benefit from the experience of other regions and organizations in addressing small arms issues. Many sources of information and much expertise could be made available to interested States by the United Nations and others to assist in responding to their specific problems.
- 32- It was noted that practical cooperation between regions across the full range of issues discussed during the Conference—including capacity-building—was especially important. Interregional cooperation led to a greater understanding of existing needs and available resources. Building the capacity of regional organizations, as well as States, was also important.
- 33- Other issues raised by some Conference participants included the potential availability in Arabic of the OSCE Best Practice Guides and the contribution of the United Nations Firearms Protocol to the fight against illicit small arms trafficking.

Day Three

- 34- The last thematic session of the conference addressed the issue of **Disarmament, Reconstruction and Reconciliation** and included a presentation of Security Council Resolution 1325 on “Women, Peace and Security”.
- 35- During this session, the experiences of Sudan and Somalia were discussed from various angles.
- 36- In the ensuing discussion, a point was raised that, important as it was, efforts to fight the illicit trade in SALW was one component of the global arms control and disarmament agenda. The right of self-defense and self-determination, under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter was also emphasized.

Conclusion

- 37- This Conference, a milestone in cooperation between the League of Arab States and the United Nations, served to underline the multi-dimensional and transnational nature of the illicit trade in SALW in all its aspects. The discussions, throughout the Conference, highlighted the need for a coordinated approach at the national, regional and global levels. The Conference represented an important step forward in strengthening cooperation between the Arab States and their relevant partners, both governmental and non-governmental.
- 38- Although international organizations and civil society have key roles to play—in partnership with governments—in the fight against the illicit trade in SALW in all its aspects, the primary responsibility for addressing this problem lies with States. In this regard, the Conference saw the Arab States reaffirm their commitment to work diligently within the framework of the UN Programme of Action to prevent, combat and eradicate this major threat to international and regional peace, stability and security.
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