

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

**MESSAGE TO THE UNITED NATIONS
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**

*Delivered by Mr. Nobuyasu Abe,
Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs*

I send my best wishes to all participants in the first Biennial Meeting of States on the Implementation of the Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of implementation of the Programme of Action, which was adopted two years ago at the first ever United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. After all, small arms and light weapons cause mass destruction. They kill about 60 people an hour or half a million people a year, 90 percent of them women and children. Less quantifiable, but no less palpable, are the wider consequences of small arms proliferation, in terms of conflicts fuelled, peacekeepers threatened, aid denied, respect for law undermined, and development stunted. As I have said before, they are truly a global scourge.

This week is the first opportunity Member States have to exchange information on how far they have come in implementing the Programme of Action at the national, regional and global level – and to take stock of how far there is to go.

It is particularly encouraging that many Member States have shown their commitment by undertaking, in the last two years, the initiatives which are reflected in the national reports submitted to the meeting. There have also been notable regional efforts during that period. In all these initiatives, civil society, and especially non-governmental organizations, have played a significant role.

I hope we will see even greater progress in implementing the Programme of Action in the years leading up to the second biennial meeting in 2005 and the Review Conference in 2006. I take this opportunity to call on all Member States to expedite the implementation of the Programme of Action, and to send my encouragement to those in a position to do so to assist others in implementation. The United Nations remains firmly committed to play its part in assisting the world community to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons in all its aspects.