

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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ADDRESS TO UNITED NATIONS SMALL ARMS  
REVIEW CONFERENCE

26 June 2006

Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Five years ago, United Nations Member States made a commitment to urgently address the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. The Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons represented a landmark consensus against the trafficking of small arms, and it gave us a blueprint to staunch the flow.

Today, we gather to mark that milestone, and to review our progress in realizing its commitments.

The problem remains grave. In a world awash with small arms, a quarter of the estimated \$4 billion annual global gun trade is believed to be illicit. Small arms are easy to buy, easy to use, easy to transport and easy to conceal. Their continued proliferation exacerbates conflict, sparks refugee flows, undermines the rule of law and spawns a culture of violence and impunity.

The majority of people who die directly from conflicts worldwide—tens of thousands of lives lost each year—and hundreds of daily crime-related deaths can be traced to illicit small arms and light weapons.

These weapons may be small, but they cause mass destruction.

I am glad to say that, since the adoption of the Programme of Action, we have seen significant progress.

Nearly 140 countries have reported on its implementation. An overwhelming majority of them have laws to restrict the flow of illicit small arms and light weapons, and well over half have established national coordinating bodies to check their spread.

In addition, a third of all States have made efforts to collect weapons from those not legally entitled to hold them. And a majority have implemented standards and procedures to secure and manage weapon stockpiles.

Regional and sub-regional cooperation to stem the flow of illicit weapons across national borders is on the rise. I particularly welcome the entry into force of the Southern African Development Community and Nairobi Protocols, and the recent transformation of the Economic Community of West African States moratorium into a legally binding instrument.

There are other noteworthy developments as well. The Firearms Protocol is now in force. The United Nations General Assembly has adopted the International Tracing Instrument to identify and trace illicit small arms. Disarmament, Demobilization and Re-integration is now a part of all United Nations peace-keeping and post conflict programmes.

And we have made advances on illicit brokering in small arms. A group of governmental experts are set to study this problem later this year. I hope they will come up with concrete recommendations on ways for States to act effectively against this nefarious activity.

Clearly, much has been accomplished, and much is currently being done. Yet important challenges remain.

There is an urgent need for Member States to introduce or update legislation meeting the standards outlined in the Programme of Action. Countries also require better stockpile management and security procedures to reduce weapons pilferage. And we must reach agreement on a realistic and effective approach to end-user certification. Without such certification, any effort to regulate the trade and brokering in small arms and light weapons will be found lacking.

At the same time, fifty-five States have yet to report on the Programme of Action. Some of the reports submitted contain insufficient data for the assessment of progress, while many national coordinating bodies lack the capacity or resources to carry out their functions. Weapon collection efforts have destroyed a mere fraction of the illicit weapons available in conflict zones, and on city streets. There is a need for even better international cooperation, and increased donor funding to match unaddressed needs.

Inevitably, States must take the lead in dealing with these complex problems, and in clamping down on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. But civil society plays a significant role as well. Through awareness campaigns, advocacy, community initiatives, research and technical expertise, civil society actors have been instrumental in our efforts to implement the Programme of Action. I am therefore delighted to see so many civil society organizations present today. I look to them to share their perspectives, their concerns and their expertise; I suspect they will do so vigorously!

Let me also note that this Review Conference is not negotiating a "global gun ban", nor do we wish to deny law-abiding citizens their right to bear arms in accordance with their national laws.

Our energy, our emphasis, and our anger is directed against illegal weapons, not legal ones. Our priorities are effective enforcement, better controls and regulation, safer stockpiling, and weapons collection and destruction. Our targets remain unscrupulous arms brokers, corrupt

officials, drug trafficking syndicates, criminals and others who bring death and mayhem into our communities, and who ruin lives and destroy in minutes the labour of years. To halt the destructive march of armed conflict and crime, we must stop such purveyors of death.

This is an ambitious—but achievable—goal. The Programme of Action has already provided us with a framework. Now, it is up to all of us, States, international and regional organizations, and civil society participants, to realize its aims.

It is in that spirit that I wish all of you a very successful Review Conference.