



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

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**Statement by**

**Ambassador James Victor GBEHO**

President of the Commission

Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS)

Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me first of all to add my voice to previous speakers in congratulating Ambassador Pablo Macedo for his election as chairman and wish him success in his functions at this important meeting. The ECOWAS associates itself with the statements made at the beginning of this meeting by Indonesia on behalf of the non alignment movement and that of Nigeria on behalf of the African Group.

The Agenda of the meeting and the discussions that have taken place so far are encouraging for those of us coming from regions where human security is threatened and development efforts are jeopardized by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

Mr. Chairman, in the framework of implementing the key provisions of the UN Programme of Action (UNPOA), ECOWAS has recorded remarkable achievements, especially through the ECOWAS Small Arms Control Programme (ECOSAP) established in June 2006 as an operational mechanism to address the menace caused by illicit trade, circulation and trafficking of SALWs in the region. Accordingly, I hereby inform you that as a result of ECOSAP's intervention, out of the 15 Member states of ECOWAS, 13 have legally established National Commissions (NATCOMs) on Small Arms and Light Weapons that are functional while the other two are at advanced stages to transform their Focal Committees to National Commissions.

Principally, as a capacity building Programme, ECOSAP provides technical and financial support to sustain the effective institutional coordination and functionality of the NATCOMs and Civil Society Organisations for operational activities, by providing office equipments, renovating office spaces in some cases, procurement of vehicles for the fifteen member states and collaboration with the Kofi Annan International Peace Keeping Centre; one of the three ECOWAS Centres of Excellence for the training of NATCOM staff and other relevant personnel. The Programme has also supported the creation of the Network of National Commissions in Member States, whereby annual meetings are organized to share information, appraise results achieved, strengths, weaknesses, challenges and prospects. As key stake holders in the fight against SALWs, ECOSAP since its inception has worked closely with the Civil Society in the region. The Programme has supported the effective functionality of the secretariat of

West African Action Network on Small Arms and Light Weapons (WAANSA) and National Coalitions of Civil society by providing them institutional support such as office space, equipments and vehicle.

Mr. Chair, in other to truly identify the nature, dynamics and extent of SALWs in the region, ECOSAP sponsored Pilot Small Arms Survey projects in the fifteen member states, with the objective of using the outcome of these studies to develop comprehensive National Action Plans for all member states. Suffice it to mention that ninety percent of the member states have concluded the studies and are in the process of elaborating their National Action Plans, while a few have already completed their Plans.

Mr. Chair, as we all know the fight against Illicit SALWs is a transnational and collective effort that cuts across borders as rightly identified by previous speakers. The large expanse of land and maritime Borders continue to be a big challenge to many regions of which ECOWAS Member states are not left out. As you may know the trafficking of SALWs across Borders is not often isolated, they are carried out together with human, vehicle and drug trafficking, therefore in this vein, the ECOWAS Commission sponsors and encourage collaboration platforms between Police, Immigration, Customs and Interpol for an effective Border control strategy. To compliment the coordination role played by ECOWAS, ECOSAP provided for member states through the National Commissions, Border control equipments such as Seaport/Airport scanners, weapons detection/Communication equipment and training of relevant personnel on the use of these equipment. In addition some review and planning meetings periodically organized by the Programme are used to create forum for border security operatives to share and exchange information and also identify possible joint initiatives.

As you know, poor Stockpile Management is one of the critical elements responsible for illicit spread of SALWs and in this regard ECOSAP has sponsored stockpile management workshops in Member States, so as to identify the challenges faced in this area with a view to reinforcing national capacities in line with international best practices. Closely connected to this aspect are the Locally Manufactured weapons, which are increasingly getting more sophisticated and proliferating for crime purposes. ECOSAP

has sponsored micro projects to regulate and where possible convert the activities of Local Arms Manufacturers in some member states such as Mali and Burkina Faso. Other Member States are programmed for similar intervention where found necessary.

Other concrete activities realized by the Programme include the support for quick impact projects, such as micro community armed violence reduction projects sponsored in some member states such as Mali, Senegal, Guinea Bissau and Guinea Conakry, arms collection and destruction activities in Ghana and Niger among other activities.

Mr. Chairman, it is not so gloomy in arms reduction process in the region, on a more positive note, I wish to announce before this gathering that the ECOWAS Convention on SALWs their ammunition and other related materials entered into force on 29<sup>th</sup> September, 2009. To date eleven (11) members out of the fifteen states have ratified and deposited their instruments of ratification, while the process of ratification is far advanced in the remaining four states. This clearly demonstrates the political will of Member states to eradicate the menace caused by illicit SALWs in the region.

Mr. Chairman, let me quickly add that the ratification of the Convention was largely made possible by ECOSAP's support to the National Commissions and Civil Society platforms, under the umbrella of WAANSA who provided support for effective lobbying and rigorous sensitization activities. Let me seize this opportunity to thank, the European Union, UNDP and other partners for financial and technical support to ECOWAS to achieve this feat.

On the strategic aspect, in line with the ECOWAS Convention on SALWs, the ECOWAS Commission has since developed and submitted for approval by Member states, the Plan of Action for the implementation of the Convention. This Plan of Action and its five year priority plan of activities (2011-2015) as well as the Exemption Request form were adopted by the council of ministers during its 64<sup>th</sup> session held in Abuja from 31<sup>st</sup> May to 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2010, after approval by Ministers of Defence and Security during their meeting in Abuja, Nigeria on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> March 2010.

The Exemption Request form is a tool which organizes the information requirements for request of arms transfer, harmonizes practices, promotes transparency and builds mutual trust among member states in order to ensure effective and efficient management and monitoring of the exemption procedures. I wish to bring to your attention in this regard, that the ECOWAS Convention explicitly bans arms transfer by Member states, except with possibility of exemption for legitimate Defense and Security needs, law enforcement and participation in peace support operations. It prohibits without exception, arms transfer to non state actors without the approval of the importing country.

In relation to this, ECOWAS Commission is engaged in a very positive dialogue with the Wassenaar arrangement since 1998, whose members are expected to demand the ECOWAS Exemption certificate prior to conclusion of an arms transfer. Furthermore, the ECOWAS Commission is engaged in elaboration of the guide lines for the harmonization of legislative provisions in Member States as provided by article 21, paragraph 3 of the Convention.

Mr. Chairman, on the basis of the excellent achievements recorded by ECOSAP since its inception as acknowledged by the ECOWAS Member states, The ECOWAS Council of Ministers have adopted the extension of ECOSAP Programme for an additional five (5) years with the mandate of implementing the operational aspects of the five year priority activities of the ECOWAS Convention adopted by the Ministers. In this vein, I wish to inform that ECOWAS through ECOSAP would continue to build the capacity of Member states through National Commissions on SALWs and Civil Society platforms for the effective control of SALWs in the region.

Mr. Chair, having highlighted some achievements recorded by ECOWAS, especially through ECOSAP and in the framework of the Convention that has come into force, I dare to state that the critical aspects is the implementation of its provisions at the regional and national levels. On this note, I wish to say that we would require substantial financial and technical support from prospective Partners and other regional organizations and agencies to accompany us implement these activities.

At this juncture, permit me on behalf of ECOWAS to express my deep appreciation to our cherished partners who have supported the Commission and ECOSAP technically and financially to have come this far in the fight against SALWs, which include, Norway, the EU, Spain, Japan, Netherlands, France, Sweden, Spain, Finland and the UNDP, we shall continue to count on your support, as we step into the next and more critical phase, which is the implementation of the provisions of the convention.

On international cooperation and assistance, we acknowledge the support and collaboration with UN agencies such as UNDP, UN DESA, UN ODA, and UNIDIR among others. The ECOWAS practice is more of a kind of partnership building for the fight against the proliferation of SALWs and therefore, ECOWAS together with our sister regional economic communities and organizations with small arms mandate under the umbrella of the African Union is engaged in promoting more cooperation, coordination and exchange of information and experience between the different regions on the continent.

Mr. Chair, I wish to conclude by inviting participants at the 4<sup>TH</sup> BMS to a Side Event to be organized by ECOWAS on Friday 18<sup>TH</sup> from 1.15pm to 2.30 pm here in the North Lawn Building at Conference Room 7, with the objective of sharing with you an overview on ECOWAS initiatives on SALWs so far

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates I thank you all for your attention!!!