Introduction

I am delighted whenever I have an opportunity to visit Thailand, though the privilege of addressing this particular seminar is especially gratifying. This is a welcome occasion to explore some new challenges of international cooperation in achieving a safer and more just world for all. Though the rapid expansion of global markets in the twentieth century has been nothing short of extraordinary, this "revolution in commercial affairs" has been accompanied by the appearance of new threats to human security. The rise, for example, of thriving global markets for illicit small arms -- and even human beings -- cannot but trouble the conscience of everyone.

New efforts -- both at the global and at the regional and national levels -- are surely needed to understand and address these challenges effectively. For this reason, I wish to thank the Government of Thailand for its cooperation in facilitating this event. I would like in particular to acknowledge the careful preparations for this seminar by the Institute of Security and
International Studies at Chulalongkorn University, as well as the assistance provided by the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Thailand.

On behalf of the U.N. Department of Disarmament Affairs, I welcome all participants to what I am sure will be a very productive seminar.

Problems Without Passports

The items on the agenda today -- the illicit markets for small arms and human beings and other trans-national crimes -- are part of an intricate tangle of challenges once summarized by Secretary-General Kofi Annan as "problems without passports." He used this term in a speech before the 1998 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. That speech could not provide a better introduction to your deliberations today, for it pinpoints the essential challenge of our time: the need to ensure that the dynamic forces of private entrepreneurship do not undermine norms and values that are recognized by all nations and enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

This seminar will focus upon efforts within the Asian region on behalf some of the most fundamental of all international norms. Leaders and citizens throughout this great region are now poised to demonstrate that their commitments to these norms are registered not just in lofty words, but also in concrete deeds.

Last July, national representatives from across the globe gathered in New York to attend the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. This Conference did not merely conclude with a pro forma hortatory appeal for collective action to address this challenge, but something much more specific -- a Programme of Action to prevent, combat, and eradicate this common danger with a prescribed set of measures.

This is an exciting process to witness -- for what we are seeing, in short, is nothing less than the combined efforts of many nations to pool their efforts to solve common security problems that no country acting alone can solve. It is ironic indeed that the forces of globalization that offer so much potential to improve the human condition also contain the potential to generate new threats to international peace and security.

The potential benefits of globalization are obvious: faster economic growth, higher living standards, a cleaner environment, new educational and employment opportunities, and a deepening of the collective interest in the avoidance of war. Yet trans-national organized criminal elements are also seeking to reap the benefits of globalization for their own purposes, which include the illicit trafficking in drugs, firearms and human beings, in particular, women and children. It is safe to say that regardless of the net effects of globalization, it is certain that the activities of non-state entities will have enormous effects on conditions of international peace and security in the new century ahead.
Some of these activities will be quite positive indeed -- and I am here referring to the constructive efforts by non-governmental organizations and individuals to promote the global values of peace, security, prosperity, freedom, and justice for all. Working in partnership with national governments, these non-state entities have roles to play that are not just constructive, but essential to progress in meeting human needs, including the need for human security. They can help enormously in undertaking research, informing the public, building support for enlightened policies, and ensuring public accountability.

The scourge of terrorism, however, offers abundant evidence of the darker side of the activities of non-state actors, as was amply demonstrated by the tragic attacks in the United States on 11 September. Yet even before that dark day in history, terrorism had long been a scourge in many countries in many regions of the world, including South East and South Asia -- killing people, destroying economies, creating refugees and eroding national stability.

International Security and the Rule of Law

While governments still have the primary responsibility for practical actions against terrorism, the international "rule of law" offers all countries important tools to address such threats through collective efforts. For example, the opening for signature in December 2000 of the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, marks a significant step forward in international cooperation on the rule of law and the fight against the global crime.

This Convention is the first comprehensive, legally-binding UN instrument in the field of crime. It aims at eliminating differences among national legal systems that have hampered mutual assistance in the past, while setting standards for domestic laws so that they can effectively combat organized crime. The new convention also aims to tackle the root cause of many -- if not all -- types of trans-national crime: profit. It will include strong measures that will allow law enforcers to confiscate criminal assets and crack down on money laundering.

Among the many protocols supplementing the Convention, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children and the Protocol against the Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Illicit Firearms, Ammunition and Related Materials are of particular relevance to the topics of this seminar.

With respect to the contributions of the international rule of law in fighting terrorism, a dozen United Nations anti-terrorism conventions -- reinforced by resolutions from the Security Council and General Assembly -- offer important additional tools to address this common threat. Greater progress in achieving universal membership in these treaties, and strengthened collective efforts to ensure their enforcement, will help enormously in reducing the incidence of non-state terrorist acts. Similarly, the culmination of the ongoing global process to eliminate all weapons of mass destruction -- a goal shared by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Chemical and Biological Weapons Conventions -- will substantially reduce the dangers of the worst imaginable forms of terrorism.
Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons

Unfortunately, the rule of law with respect to the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons is far less developed, and the global norm-building process is still in its infancy. This shortcoming is particularly alarming because there are estimated to be at least 500 million small arms and light weapons in circulation -- one for every 12 people on earth. In Asia, as in many other regions, these weapons often end up in the hands of irregular troops, criminals, drug traffickers and terrorists.

Small arms and light weapons are made to maim and kill. According to the independent Small Arms Survey 2001, even conservative estimates suggest that well over half a million lives are lost to them each year: some 300,000 in armed conflict and another 200,000 from gun-inflicted homicides and suicides. The proliferation of such weapons aggravates conflicts, sparks refugee flows, undermines the rule of law, and spawns a culture of violence and impunity. The opportunity costs of such small arms in terms of foregone investment, health costs and lost education opportunities run into the billions of dollars. The indirect socio-economic impacts, while hard to measure, are devastating, especially for developing countries.

The illicit trade in such weapons, in short, raises an issue not just for disarmament or arms control. It also has profound effects upon hopes for progress in achieving the goals of development, democracy, human rights and human security. While this challenge is undoubtedly global in scope, each region -- and each country within each region -- must take steps to implement their legal and policy commitments.

United Nations Conference and the Programme of Action

There are many indications that states and regions are rising to this challenge. Efforts in West Africa include the ECOWAS Moratorium on imports, exports and manufacture of small arms -- while across the Atlantic, the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms marks another step forward. The powerful symbol of the famous "Flame of Peace" in Africa -- which burned tens of thousands of illicit weapons -- has inspired additional weapons collection and destruction programmes in Albania, Cambodia and Colombia. Each region clearly has its own contributions to make in this global cause.

It is encouraging that countries are already taking action to implement the Programme of Action. Some are already putting in place or strengthening national legislation and regulations to control the manufacture and transfer of these weapons, while others are launching programmes for the voluntary surrender of illicit weapons.

The Government of Tanzania, for example, has recently devised a "National Plan of Action" to combat and eradicate the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. It developed this plan in close consultation with local authorities and groups in civil society, in particular an NGO called
SaferAfrica. It undertook a systematic evaluation of the small arms problem in Tanzania, analysed the numerous impacts of the illicit trade in firearms upon local communities, and inaugurated new policies and institutions to implement them. This is just one illustration of a global norm in action -- it shows how the results of the recent UN conference on small arms are starting to translate into concrete national initiatives.

The broader significance of that conference is two-fold -- it placed the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons firmly in the international security agenda, and in so doing, it will ensure that the issue will receive close attention at the highest levels of governments. By adopting the Programme of Action, international community has begun the important process of norm building and constructive global action against the illicit trade and proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Successful implementation will require a comprehensive approach to the problem, one that addresses the inter-linked issues of drug trafficking, trans-national organized crime and terrorism.

Harmony of Regional and Global Efforts

Success in addressing these difficult global problems will require parallel initiatives undertaken at the regional and sub-regional level. Close cooperation among States, between States and the United Nations, and among other international and regional organizations plays a key role in the efforts to combat the illicit trade in small arms. This partnership lies at the heart of the Programme of Action of the small arms conference, and I hope that this timely seminar will succeed in identifying some new avenues for strengthening this cooperation in the future.

The United Nations has played a leading role in drawing the worlds' attention to the dangers of small arms and light weapons and to place the issue firmly on the international agenda. During the past few years, the Department of Disarmament Affairs has been -- upon request -- helping States to address the problems posed by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, particularly in the context of peace building activities. One such area of cooperation is in the field of practical disarmament measures, particularly "weapons-for-development" projects aimed at retrieving and collecting illegal weapons in exchange for community-based development incentives.

The Gramsh Pilot Project on weapon collection in Albania is a case in point. The project offered a combined package of improved citizen security, voluntary weapons surrender and community-based employment-creating and income-generating development incentives, particularly for the youth. With the joint and coordinated efforts by the Albania government, the United Nations, donor countries and civil society, the project was successfully implemented -- thousands of weapons were voluntarily surrendered and destroyed. In return, the people in the local community enjoy greatly improved security and upgraded community infrastructure and service, such as better lighting and telecommunication system, renovated post office and new roads and bridges.
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This project has revealed the need to design responses to meet the specific requirements of each affected community. It demonstrated that international assistance can have a significant impact, and underscored the importance of conducting awareness-raising and public information campaigns, followed by the implementation of projects in a people-centred framework. The success of the approach in Albania has helped the United Nations to carry out similar projects in other regions.

Conclusion

Having entered a new Millennium, the world still faces many challenges, including ruthless conflicts, grinding poverty, chronic social and economic inequality, contagious diseases, and environmental crises, among others. There will inevitably be variations among the instruments and paths chosen by leaders in different regions to address these problems. The common goal is to achieve a more peaceful, prosperous and just world in the new century.

This important regional meeting is a practical answer to the call by the people and leaders to uphold the human dignity, social justice, strengthen the rule of law and enhance human security.

I wish you a most productive meeting.