"Innovative approaches such as 'weapons for development' and 'weapons for food' programmes are yielding concrete results as practical disarmament measures at the community level." (UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan)

Introduction

We meet on the eve of an anniversary of a day of terror and infamy that shook the world. It was a new challenge to peace the repercussions of which remain with us. We meet at a time when peace is imperilled: war drums are beating loudly and global military expenditure is at $839 billion for 2001 and rising alarmingly to Cold war levels.

There are many kinds of peace. They talk of an honourable peace: an armed peace—even a peace of the graveyard. But what peace do we really want to last? Surely it is a stable, secure
and just peace. Such a peace is not achieved by building war machines or having as a deterrent huge stockpiles of weapons that can destroy the world several times over.

We need investment in human development to provide economic security: we need the practice of human rights for the efflorescence of the human spirit; we need democratic space for the fulfilment of the aspirations of peoples and we need education for disarmament and non-proliferation as a long term insurance policy so that future generations can have the right values as a compass towards peace.

Let me first say how pleased I am to be here today to address your Conference. Your choice of topic is significant, not only because of the large number of societies emerging from conflict on the UN's agenda, but also because of the reference to disarmament as an essential, indeed indispensable, element. To address the problems of conflict-ridden and post-conflict societies in any significant way we must recognize that the continued proliferation of arms is a certain recipe for the recrudescence of conflicts.

Disarmed, Demobilised and Reintegrated

In recent years, the changing character and scale of armed conflicts have drastically increased demands on humanitarian and development agencies of all kinds to assist in emergency relief and peace-building efforts. In these mostly internal conflicts, a high proportion of the victims are civilian, with a disturbingly large number being women and children. Not only are civilians the primary victims, but in these internal conflicts involving both regular and irregular forces, the distinction between combatants and non-combatants also becomes blurred. One of the results of this is a massive presence of small arms and light weapons in unaccounted for civilian possession.

The major challenge for all conflict-affected countries is the re-establishment of a secure peace. Peace is not simply the cessation of hostilities; it is the dynamic management of human, political, and economic development and change by non-violent means. The successful reintegration of ex-combatants back into normal civilian life is a key factor for the stability of post-conflict countries.

Recent studies have shown that one of the most important variables in determining a country's chances of returning to conflict is a history of conflict. Opportunities for peaceful development become tangible only once a cease-fire or a comprehensive peace agreement is in place. Such an agreement must provide the first steps for political and economic reconstruction, and indicate a willingness on the part of all (former) warring parties to disarm and to cooperate in the re-integration of conflict-affected people.

Of course, the more detailed and operational the provisions for reintegration in a peace agreement are, the greater the chances that these people can be helped through well-planned assistance. There is always a danger in the difficult and insecure period immediately following a
peace agreement that the preoccupation with sensitive political issues will distract attention from measures to reintegrate ex-combatants. Thus, reintegration programmes may be largely ad hoc, under-funded or insufficient, with the result that former soldiers remain unemployed and frustrated.

Once demobilised and with nothing to do, these former combatants can cause new security threats and a recurrence of conflicts on a local, national, or regional scale. Such threats have indeed presented themselves on numerous occasions. Furthermore, the disadvantaged members of the former warring armies, including child soldiers, women soldiers and war-disabled soldiers may become marginalized and poverty-stricken if no appropriate reintegration programmes are planned well in advance of demobilisation. Empirical data from countries emerging from conflict seems to indicate a tendency of such ex-combatants to become involved in criminal activities. Within this, illicit trafficking in small arms figures highly.

Many obstacles challenge the design and effective implementation of reintegration programmes, including the level of distrust among factions; conflict-related trauma; proliferation of small arms and light weapons; weak capacity of communities to absorb demobilized combatants; persistent insecurity or high levels of crime; inaccessibility to some areas because of damaged infrastructure, or due to the presence of landmines; and weak administrative and institutional structures. The planning of reintegration programmes and strategies should to be mindful of such challenges, as well as of the causes that originally gave rise to the conflict.

Reintegration strategies often fail to tap into the immense potential resource represented by local communities. Internal conflicts often involve a breakdown of local norms and values within societies, especially in regards to the protection of children and other vulnerable groups. Restoring these norms and values, which can only be achieved with the active participation of local communities, is critical. For example, in Angola and Mozambique local communities have used, to great effect, traditional religious beliefs and healing practices to heal the psychological and social impact of the war and facilitate the acceptance of former soldiers back into society. We need to deepen our understanding of, engagement and meaningful interaction with local actors, since community ownership is a critical pre-requisite for the sustainability of reintegration strategies.

**Practical measures at the international level**

With its genesis in *An Agenda for Peace* and its *Supplement*, the concept of practical disarmament measures was developed to fill a gap in the existing disarmament agenda when there were no agreed international measures to control small arms and light weapons - exactly those weapons most often used in current conflicts, and whose use regularly lead to violations of international humanitarian law. Since this initiative began, its principles have been incorporated in the *Millennium Declaration* and the *Programme of Action* resulting from the UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects.
In 1996, for the first time, a resolution on the "Consolidation of peace through practical disarmament measures" was introduced by Germany in the First Committee and, at its 51st session, the General Assembly adopted it by consensus. Every year since then, this resolution has been adopted by consensus and the ever-growing number of countries from all regions of the world co-sponsoring this resolution is proof of the widespread acceptance of these principles. It is within this context that, in 1997, the Group of Interested States in Practical Disarmament Measures (GIS) was created.

The Group of Interested States in Practical Disarmament Measures

The Group of Interested States met for the first time in March 1998, with representatives of over 60 countries attending. The Group is a true partnership between States requesting assistance; States with the resources and willingness to provide aid; other States that can contribute to the Group's discussion by drawing upon their own specific experiences in practical disarmament; and UN departments and agencies, such as the Department of Disarmament Affairs (DDA) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

The GIS meets to examine concrete projects and wherever possible joint support to practical disarmament, particularly as designed and initiated by affected countries. Participants discuss policy issues relating to projects, exchange information about relevant lessons learned in the field of practical disarmament, and its dissemination to interested countries and encourage harmonisation of national legislation to monitor illicit arms traffic across borders. The focus is on "hands-on" proposals with practical and attainable objectives that would have a real impact on the population affected.

What has been accomplished

Early initiatives included seminars and workshops that contributed to the growing pool of experience in the field of practical disarmament measures. A sub-regional seminar in Cameroon in July 1998 focused on the need to elaborate DDR national training programmes and the need to establish a regional cooperative mechanism. The seminar provided an opportunity to share the experiences of DDR in Chad, Eritrea and Uganda with the goal of applying those lessons to other post-conflict situations in the sub-region.

In November 1998 a Central American workshop was held in Guatemala to exchange experiences in weapons collection and the integration of former combatants into civil society. It launched a three-phase programme of integrating ex-combatants in the context of national reconciliation and socio-economic rehabilitation. An interesting point raised was that granting special privileges to the former combatants could be grudged by the civil society at large that has already borne the brunt of the violence of armed conflict.

Weapons-for development programmes constitute one of the most promising initiatives undertaken by the Department of Disarmament Affairs and the GIS in the field of practical
disarmament measures. This approach was first employed in Gramsh, Albania, in 1999-2000. Responding to a request by the Government of Albania, United Nations officials, in consultations with local authorities and population, devised an unprecedented programme which the local community collected and voluntarily surrendered weapons, in exchange for the implementation of UN-sponsored development projects.

The pilot project, implemented by UNDP, had three inter-linked objectives: first, to induce the civilian population to voluntarily turn in their weapons through the promise of development activities benefiting the community as a whole; second, to promote the empowerment of the community and restoration of confidence in local authorities, by involving the population in the identification and implementation of specific development projects; and third, to provide labour intensive and income generating activities that would generate short-term employment and infrastructural improvement benefits to the communities.

The project was considered a success: some 6,000 weapons and 137 tons of ammunition were collected, and the number of violent crimes involving the use of small arms fell dramatically. More importantly, people said that they felt safer, that they had learned to work together as a community and were more confident about their future.

A 'weapons-for-development' project is also been implemented by the UNDP in Nguigmi, Niger, following a DDA-led UN mission in August 2000 to assess the small arms situation in the country. And in Cambodia the Organisation is assisting in the Royal Government's own weapons for development pilot project in the Bakan District.

Additionally, recent fact-finding missions to Kenya, Sri Lanka and Papua New Guinea have found that practical disarmament measures are not always centred on weapons swaps, but can include a variety of proposals to increase the sense of security in a post-conflict society. Recommendations of such missions have included practical measures to strengthen civil society participation and the observance of the rule of law.

**Follow-up to the UN Conference on the Illicit Traffic in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects**

The Programme of Action (PoA) adopted at the July 2001 Small Arms conference recognises the importance of practical disarmament measures and calls on the United Nations to undertake a wide range of actions to promote its implementation at the national, regional and global levels.

DDA has identified the establishment and/or strengthening of national commissions on small arms as a primary tool to accomplish the objectives of the PoA. In establishing national commissions, we believe that the efforts of the State could be complemented and enriched by the contributions of civil society bodies. The commissions should undertake the analysis of the magnitude, scope and specific manifestations of the illicit small arms problem in the affected
country, identifying what has to be done, how it should be done, by whom, where, and when; what resources can the nation commit to this effort; what additional resources are required; and what role should interested external actors play.

In short, such commissions can contribute to the development in affected countries of an effective sense of national responsibility to address the small arms challenge, and national ownership of the solutions.

Conclusion

According to a study by the Best Practices Unit of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, "the United Nations experience has been that the weapons surrendered in the first waves of disarmament are either useless or of very poor quality. The quality and calibre of the weapons improves as the disarmament proceeds and mutual trust and confidence is gradually being built. The best weapons and forces are held in reserve for the last stages of the process, usually as a hedge against a return to conflict."

Furthermore, the most recent available statistics indicate that there are some 639 million firearms in the global stockpile. In Central America it was estimated that for every 1,000 weapons collected some 100,000 remained in unaccounted circulation.

Adding these facts to the experiences I have discussed, we can conclude that while the probability of actually collecting these quantities of weapons in post-conflict societies remains daunting, the main goal of PDMs has got to be developing trust and a sense of security in affected populations.

Practical disarmament measures, such as weapons for development projects, by bringing together members of a community and initiating a dialogue to decide on development priorities do more than collect weapons and build new roads and street lights, they foster community ties that are essential for lasting peace.