Mr. Secretary-General, Mr. Minister, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

At the outset, on behalf of the United Nations, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the League of Arab States and to you, Mr. Secretary-General, for the cooperation of your organization in organizing this conference and in hosting it here in Cairo, at the Headquarters of the League. I would also like to express my heartfelt thanks to H.E. Mr. Ahmed Maher El Sayed, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Arab Republic of Egypt, for his Government’s support.

This is the first time that the Department of Disarmament Affairs, through its Regional Branch, is partnering with the League of Arab States to discuss disarmament issues. The implementation of the UN Programme of Action on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects presents an excellent opportunity to reflect jointly on this issue, which
is one of the priorities of the UN. This conference is also part of the process supported by Secretary-General Kofi Annan to strengthen cooperation between the UN and Regional Organizations through meetings and the exchange of information.

The UN, and in particular DDA, attaches great importance to the complementary role of regional arrangements in the field of disarmament, and more specifically their initiatives to reduce the illicit spread of SALW. This conference augurs well for the progress that can be achieved in disarmament, peace, and security within our respective mandates and in the overall context of Chapter 8 of the UN Charter, which specifically calls for the involvement of regional arrangements or agencies in the maintenance of international peace and security.

Small arms and light weapons are the principal tools of violence used in many regional and intra-State conflicts, and the perpetration of crime. While experts may disagree over the deeper causes of this violence, nobody can dispute its horrific social and economic effects. The illicit trade in such weapons – many of which were produced quite legally – only worsens both the causes and effects of this violence, which has affected States across the globe.

The Programme of Action -- adopted in July 2001 -- is therefore a milestone not just in the global effort to control such arms, but also in the wider effort to strengthen international peace and security. It constitutes a decisive step towards the formulation of international norms to tackle the problem of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects. It has become a common compass for guiding the world community’s efforts to combat the illicit trade in such weaponry.

To succeed, these efforts must be reinforced by initiatives at the regional and national levels, taking into account the specific situation and needs of each region and each country. But when searching for the adequate response to specific local and regional circumstances, States are not alone. The Programme of Action also encourages inter-regional cooperation to complement the implementation by States. The United Nations Department of Disarmament Affairs stands ready to assist States in translating these global norms of the Programme of Action into tangible regional and national measures.

This conference is an opportunity for Arab States – and others interested in the subregion – to get together and consider next steps in light of the progress made at the First Biennial Meeting of States. Twelve Member States of the League of Arab States provided reports on the status of their implementation of the Programme of Action, with some also reporting on their legislation concerning ownership of -- and trade in -- small arms and light weapons.

States throughout the world have identified several challenges that need to be addressed in the coming years, ahead of the next biennial meeting in 2005 and the review conference of 2006. In their national reports, a majority of Arab States have expressed their need for capacity building. The challenges ahead are enormous, involving a host of complex, inter-related issues,
including -- Security sector reform, institution building, international cooperation, increased regional coordination, sharing national experience on police, customs, and other law enforcement agencies, and effective partnerships among governments and with civil society.

This includes national administrative, legislative, and managerial measures, as well as weapons collection and destruction, education campaigns, and the promotion of local civil society organizations. A first step could be the creation of properly empowered and well-trained National Commissions, which could be used as the primary vehicle for channelling capacity-building efforts at the national level. They could develop the capacity to collect and analyse relevant data, identify, and quantify the causes and scope of specific problems and propose adequate measures and policies to tackle such problems.

At the regional level, it is necessary to develop a capacity to establish effective and sustainable cooperative arrangements aimed at curbing the illicit flow of weapons across common borders. Without appropriate measures at the regional level, national efforts may be rendered largely ineffective, as borders are often porous and problems in one country, if not contained, may spill over into neighbouring countries.

The Programme of Action also calls for the promotion of dialogue and a culture of peace by encouraging education and public awareness programmes on the problems of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects, involving all sectors of society. Since the first *Flamme de la Paix* in Timbuktu in 1996, it is now well-understood that public knowledge, acceptance and participation in the process of small arms control is essential. We know that this process must be cast in the broader framework of peace building and be sustained by regular, public commemorative events.

Another important way to sustain the peace and disarmament process is through disarmament education -- in schooling, informal training in communities, and specific training at targeted communities, such as police, the military, diplomats, and government officials. The goals are to stimulate thought and debate, to explain legislation, and to give impetus to action. In the UN’s Lima and Lomé Regional Centres, we are training trainers, parliamentarians, and representatives of civil society in the control of small arms. In Albania, Cambodia, Niger, and Peru, we are working with youth and children in high schools and their teachers, administrators, parents, and local government officials to give alternatives to the resort to weapons. We hope that the good results we achieve can be replicated in other affected communities throughout the world.

Within these communities, women have been among the most seriously affected. Despite – and in some measure because of – this effect, women remain an essential pillar supporting the construction of peace, stability, and development, as recognized in Security Council Resolution 1325 on “Women, Peace and Security.” In the context of disarmament, this translates into making sure that women are sitting at the negotiation table; including female ex-combatants and supporters in Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration programmes; taking into
consideration the widespread effects of SALW upon women and girls; and acknowledging and strengthening women’s contributions to micro-disarmament initiatives.

Beyond the Programme of Action, the First Committee of the 58th General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to hold broad-based consultations with all Member States, as well as interested regional and subregional organizations, on cooperation in preventing, combating, and eradicating illicit brokering. DDA will consult with States as well as interested regional and subregional organizations in the coming year. I am looking forward to these consultations and the very important input from the League of Arab States and its Members.

Partnerships between States, the United Nations and Regional Organizations and a continuous dialogue on issues related to Small Arms and Light Weapons are vital in the pursuit of general and complete disarmament. The United Nations, and especially DDA, is a partner and an ally in the fight against the illicit trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons and for the realization of a safer world.

Before declaring this Conference open, allow me again to extend my thanks and gratitude to the League of Arab States for the excellent cooperation in the preparation of this conference, the Government of Egypt for its support, and also to Germany and Norway, for their generous financial contributions to this Conference.

I wish you success in your deliberations.

Thank you

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1 Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen