Excellencies,
Distinguished Members of Parliament,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, allow me to thank you for cordially inviting me to address this distinguished audience of honourable Members of Parliament from around the world. I am also thankful to Ambassador Jarmo Viinanen, Permanent Representative of Finland to the United Nations, for hosting this important event.

Parliamentarians are uniquely placed to bring effective and meaningful change to their countries and, ultimately, to the world. As representatives of the will of their people, parliamentarians are a crucial check on government power. Also, they embody progress as they bring together diverse interests and translate them into new national laws. Moreover, parliamentarians are responsible for ratifying international treaties, which makes them important global actors for change. They also appropriate funds and enact domestic legislation to enable such treaties to be fully implemented.

[Small Arms]

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me say a few words on the inter-related topics of small arms and an arms trade treaty.

Without question, the illicit trade or use of “small arms and light weapons” has had catastrophic humanitarian and economic effects around the world, as documented in numerous studies and United Nations conferences on these issues.

Such consequences have inspired some significant responses in the world community. Since the adoption in 2001, here at the UN, of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, States have made considerable progress in implementing it. Weapons collection and destruction activities have continued, with thousands of weapons and millions of rounds of ammunition destroyed. National coordination bodies have been established and existing ones strengthened. And States are increasingly focusing their attention on implementing a separate agreement on the marking and tracing of weapons which was adopted under the umbrella of the Programme of Action in 2005.
Despite the progress made to-date, major challenges remain.

These include:

- the lack of adequate national capacity in institutions of several States, like police, prosecution offices and customs;
- the need to offer alternative livelihoods to young people who see the use of firearms as an easy way to obtain status and income;
- border porosity in most affected regions;
- the need for comprehensive National Action Plans on small arms with clear benchmarks and achievable goals;
- poor coordination of international cooperation and assistance;
- and insufficient involvement of civil society in efforts to tackle small arms.

In the light of these challenges, countries have agreed to action-oriented outcome documents at Biennial Meetings of States on small arms, in 2008 and last year in 2010.

Among their recommendations are:

- the need to improve stockpile management, because poorly managed stockpiles form significant sources of diversion of weapons and ammunition into illicit markets;
- the need to strengthen national control systems on the import and export of small arms, including systems for end-user certification;
- the crucial importance of better international cooperation to combat illicit arms brokering;
- the central role of functioning border controls;
- And the need to free up more funds from countries in a position to help on these issues.

Most importantly, there is a need to broaden our perspective and improve our understanding of the root causes of the illicit small arms trade, including those that stem from social and economic development factors. States wanting to book results in the fight against the illicit arms trade will need to look at the nexus between security and development, where supply and demand aspects interlink.

Meanwhile, I hope that the Parliamentarians for Global Action would encourage its Members to push and advocate for the drafting of adequate legislation to address such challenges. Perhaps most needed right now are efforts to adopt national action plans that have clear benchmarks and time frames for preventing and combating the proliferation of illegal small arms, as well as additional efforts to promote and monitor the implementation of such plans. These efforts should also include measures to strengthen government accountability in fulfilling the responsibilities provided in such plans.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, is part of a wider problem: the unregulated trade in all conventional arms. In all parts of the world, the ready availability of conventional weapons and ammunition has led to human suffering, repression, crime and terror among civilian populations. Sometimes, the irresponsible transfer of conventional weapons can destabilize security in a region, enable the violation of Security Council arms embargoes and contribute to human rights abuses. Importantly, investment is discouraged and development disrupted in countries experiencing conflict and high levels of violence, which also affect their ability to attain the Millennium Development Goals.

These factors have contributed to the recent drive calling for the global regulation of the conventional arms trade, which has garnered support from politicians and civil society alike.

As you are aware, the General Assembly has decided to address this challenge by organizing a four-week conference to be held next summer for the purpose of negotiating an arms trade treaty. The third session of the Preparatory Committee for that conference is taking place this week, and this will be followed by a fourth session in February.

The initiative to start work on an arms trade treaty in the UN was taken four years ago. Some commentators are frustrated with the slow rate of progress. But such a process takes time. Countries need to coordinate internally, check with their manufacturers and exporters, sound each other out, and formulate regional positions. This is indispensable in building an international consensus necessary for this treaty to be fully multilateral in scope.

There are wide differences among States over such questions as what type of weapons or activities it should cover; what criteria should be used to determine if arms can be exported, and who would decide whether a violation has occurred or not.

Also, States will need to see how an arms trade treaty will fit into the UN disarmament architecture. I have encouraged delegations to consider in their deliberations the need to maximize complementarities among the various instruments in the field conventional weapons, so that the United Nations may provide a more effective and inclusive framework for regulating transfers of conventional arms.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Progress towards concluding an arms trade treaty will clearly require strong and sustained pressure and support from all concerned. I hope that the PGA will continue to play their important role in promoting coordinated action at the inter-parliamentary level, and in supporting and giving impetus to important initiatives, such as an Arms Trade Treaty, that seek to prevent human suffering by irresponsible conventional arms transfers.

Thank you.