Preparatory Committee for the
United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in
The Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent,
Combat and Eradicate the Illicit
Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects

Opening remarks

By

Ms. Angela Kane
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

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Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates and Experts,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me a great pleasure to address you here today in my very first official function as High Representative for Disarmament Affairs. I look forward to working closely with all of you on issues that are among the Secretary-General’s priorities.

I have always viewed disarmament and the regulation of armaments as two key mandates in the United Nations Charter. Despite many well-known obstacles in achieving these goals, I believe progress is possible -- and it must be possible. The price of failure is too high, and the benefits of success are overwhelmingly clear. This is true throughout this field, especially with respect to confronting the challenges connected with the illicit trade in small arms.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In 2001, States gathered at the United Nations to tackle this global security challenge, and unanimously adopted the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. Four years later, States agreed on the “International Tracing Instrument”, which stemmed from the commitment in the Programme of Action to develop cooperation on marking, record-keeping and tracing of small arms.

Since the adoption of these two instruments, many States have enacted or strengthened legislation aimed at stemming the proliferation of illicit small arms. States have improved the security of stockpiles, and millions of surplus weapons have been destroyed around the world.

States have acknowledged that there can be no development without security and no security without development. Donor countries have formally decided that small arms-related programmes can be seen as official development aid.

Some affected States have begun to integrate small-arms action plans into national development strategies, in view of the multi-faceted nature of small arms problems – connecting their development, crime prevention, national security, and public health agendas.

Regional cooperation on small arms has progressed in some parts of the world. A growing number of States have adopted transparency and confidence-building measures by providing national reports on the implementation of the Programme of Action, and by reporting their small arms transfers to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms.
Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has indicated that significant progress has been achieved, but that serious gaps remain regarding the implementation of the Programme of Action.

The number of national reports submitted by States remains low in some regions.

There is ample room for improvement regarding some control measures such as in the areas of marking and tracing, and illicit arms brokering.

The exchange of information and knowledge could be further improved, in particular between States’ investigative and law enforcement authorities.

Although international cooperation and assistance have intensified in recent years, many Member States still lack capacity and resources.

And in addition to the weaknesses in implementation at national, regional and global levels, the Programme of Action itself suffers from the absence of measurable benchmarks and concrete targets for implementation.

This year’s Review Conference provides unique opportunities as well as challenges.

Opportunities because we are on the heels of a series of successful global meetings that took place in recent years; the Third and Fourth Biennial Meeting of States in 2008 and 2010 respectively, and last year’s first-ever Meeting of Governmental Experts, which held focused and interactive discussion on the issues of marking, record-keeping and tracing of small arms and light weapons. Member States can bank on the results of those meetings.

However, significant challenges remain. Many of you will remember the first Review Conference in 2006, and its Preparatory Committee, both of which ended without an agreed outcome document.

Important lessons have been learned from that experience, such as the value of starting preparations well in advance of the meeting, and agreeing that time management is of utmost importance, before and also during the meeting.

I cannot stress enough the importance of bringing this year’s review conference to a successful conclusion. We need to ensure that the implementation of the Programme of Action and its International Tracing Instrument will be enhanced and strengthened in the coming years. From the perspective of the UN system, that could include in particular an acknowledgement of the interconnectedness of small arms control issues with development themes, and addressing what the Secretary-General has called the Programme of Action’s lack of measurability and of specific numerical targets, benchmarks or cut-off dates.
Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to commend the Chair Ogwu and her team for her dedicated efforts so far in preparing for this meeting, which have been highly inclusive and thorough. I am also very pleased with the wide participation by inter-governmental and regional organizations and civil society.

Please be assured that the Secretariat will do its utmost to provide the required assistance to Member States to make this meeting a successful one.

I wish all of you inspiring and fruitful discussions during the next five days, and I trust that a substantive outcome will pave the way for a successful review later this year. We owe this to the scores of people who fall victim to illicit small arms every day, every hour, every minute.

Thank you.