Opening Remarks

By

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Enhancing African States' Capacities for the 2012 ATT Conference in New York

African Regional Consultations on the Arms Trade Treaty
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Excellencies, Distinguished Experts, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you to the African Regional Consultations on the Arms Trade Treaty. This is my first opportunity to address African Member States on this vital issue in my capacity as High Representative for Disarmament Affairs.

The United Nations and the African Union enjoy close cooperation within the UN-AU Ten Year Capacity Building Programme for Peace and Development. On 21 August 2009, the Peace and Security Council of the AU and ODA agreed to focus their cooperation on small arms and light weapons. This seminar is a concrete example of this cooperation.

I wish to congratulate Ambassador Roberto García Moritán for his skilful stewardship of the work of the ATT Preparatory Committee and for his nomination as President-designate of the ATT Conference, which will take place in July. His presence here and his intimate knowledge of the ATT process will be invaluable to these regional consultations.

The UN has long provided a common venue for advancing this process. We in the Secretariat are committed to assist Member States in developing a robust ATT, a treaty whose importance can scarcely be over-stated. It will help reduce arms transfers to actors when there is high risk such weapons would be used to commit grave violations of international humanitarian or human rights law, to fuel conflict or crime and to hinder development. This support stems from our mandate to provide all necessary assistance to the July Conference, and from our awareness of the appalling human costs from the unregulated arms trade.

All too often, armed insecurity – fuelled by poorly regulated arms transfers – prevents us from reaching our individual and collective goals. These goals include assisting States in preventing conflict and in promoting national reconciliation. They extend to crime prevention and reduction, to conducting peacekeeping operations, and to achieving the Millennium Development Goals—which include protecting human rights, providing humanitarian aid, empowering women, protecting children, or improving public health.

Throughout the world – particularly in Africa– the easy accessibility of weapons and ammunition have led to armed violence, humanitarian crises, repression, crime and terror among civilian populations, and missed opportunities for social and economic development.

All key sectors the world trade are covered by internationally agreed rules that bind countries in agreed conduct. Why then not be bound by rules when transferring weapons?

Without robust common standards to guide national decisions on arms transfers, it is easier for arms to be used in violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law and to be diverted to illicit markets. Member States bear a solemn responsibility to address this problem by ensuring that arms transfers do not exacerbate conflicts, pose a threat to the safety and security of civilians, or undermine peacebuilding and development efforts.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At this juncture, allow me to salute the efforts already undertaken by African States through their expressed commitment and political support to the ATT process, including the various sub-regional common positions and the Draft AU Common Position, which is expected to be finalized at the African Union Summit next July.
I also wish to commend civil society organizations that have actively promoted regulation of the conventional arms trade. Their impressive presence here today testifies to the importance of the ATT, the first global treaty of its kind in conventional arms control.

Concerted regional action, as well as the political will to rise above individual national interests, will be necessary for a successful outcome of the negotiations that lie ahead.

This regional consultation will provide a unique opportunity for African experts to deepen their understanding of ATT issues in their preparations for the negotiations at the July Conference in New York. It is also an opportunity for African States to voice once again their support for a strong, robust, comprehensive, effective, and legally-binding ATT. Such a Treaty would set the highest common standards for the transfer of conventional weapons, including small arms and light weapons and ammunition. And it would also serve as a means to buttress existing regional and sub-regional initiatives, including the Programme of Action on Small Arms, the Firearms Protocol and the International Tracing Instrument.

I wish to express my appreciation to IANSA and to all who have worked so hard to organize this meeting—especially the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, for its warm hospitality in welcoming all participants to these consultations.

I also wish to extend my sincere thanks to the President of the African Union Commission, His Excellency Mr Jean Ping, through Commissioner Lamamra and all the African Union staff involved in the preparations, for their hospitality in these premises, their readiness and availability, and for their many efforts in making this meeting possible.

Allow me also to recognize and to thank my colleagues from the UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament (UNREC) in Lomé, for their efforts not just in organizing these regional consultations, but in promoting peace, security, and disarmament goals in Africa.

My gratitude also goes to the Government of Australia for its interest in the promotion of disarmament, peace and security both in Africa and globally, and for its financial generosity which made it possible for these regional consultations to be organized.

Finally, I would like to thank those countries that have provided financial and in-kind contributions to UNREC in Lomé. I count on their continued support to UNREC disarmament programmes, which are designed to meet security needs throughout the region.

I wish all participants a productive and fruitful discussion during these two days, and I declare open these African regional consultations on the Arms Trade Treaty.