Illegal guns can become dreadful force multipliers. They make it possible for pirates to capture the largest ships, for drug lords to randomly kill law enforcers or anyone else interfering with their illegal businesses, for bandits to hijack humanitarian aid convoys, for illegal owners to intimidate their households and commit gender-based violence, and for mobs to terrorise complete cities. All over the world, uncontrolled small arms in circulation form a massive threat to safety, property, stability and development.

Controlling the illegal spread and curbing the misuse of guns have been an important topic on the global disarmament agenda. In the last decade alone, initiatives include the Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons, its International Tracing Instrument, and the Firearms Protocol – all developed to contribute to a global framework for dealing with the proliferation of illicit firepower.

Another initiative is expected to join this set of agreements. In less than a month’s time, the Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty will commence its final four weeks of negotiations in New York. This is arguably the most significant initiative ever in the area of conventional weapons regulation within the United Nations. One of the expected key benefits of a robust Arms Trade Treaty would be that it will be more difficult for guns to be traded outside of proper national regulations and procedures.

But disarmament is not an issue of concern to governments alone. The Global Week of Action against Gun Violence provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the important contribution civil society makes in the areas of small arms control and the prevention of armed violence. It is at the local level that we see the brave initiatives, that we see the commitment and perseverance flourish that in practice lead to more peaceful, more liveable communities.

I call upon all governments to cultivate and intensify their cooperation with civil society on curbing armed violence in all its manifestations. On behalf of the United Nations, I commend the organizers of the Global Week of Action against Violence for their relentless effort as ‘peace multipliers’ in keeping gun violence on the agenda of the international community.