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

Statement by the President of the Conference

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Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

We are all aware of the negative impact of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. It is a deeply disturbing and lasting problem, on all continents. But especially in many developing countries, in countries just coming out of conflict, and countries with a fragile social fabric, including those on the African continent where I came from.

Weapons bring power to their bearers. They multiply force. So wherever power is abused, weapons profoundly exacerbate the situation. Rebel groups denying humanitarian aid to be delivered. Urban gang members extorting businesses. Private citizens committing gender-based violence. Pirates going after a cargo. Drug barons, not hesitating to take on law enforcement. Terrorists plotting to sow fear and destruction. For all, the simple arithmetic is that the easy availability of illicit firepower maximally expands their impact, and the havoc they cause.

The Programme of Action and its International Tracing Instrument have been concluded to counter these threats. They are global instruments, agreed to by all. But the power of these documents is not in their paragraphs. It lies in the national ownership governments can display regarding the norms and commitments agreed to in these texts. Only when countries effectively implement the provisions on improving export legislation, on setting up weapons marking / record-keeping and tracing systems, on tackling illicit brokering, on improving their stockpile management, and on strengthening cooperation, will these documents prove their value. And that is what this conference will need to give guidance and impetus to.

In preparing for this meeting, I traveled to a number of continents, and participated in a series of regional meetings organised by the Secretariat. Also, in Geneva I held consultations, and was informed by the experts from the Small Arms Survey Institute.
Over the months, we worked to produce draft outcome documents in a truly collaborative effort, because they were really a reflection of all the inputs I received.

Now our Review Conference can begin. In just nine days, we need to agree on a shared vision regarding what has been achieved, and what must be done next to make progress on the Programme of Action and the International Tracing Instrument.

I thank the many delegates who have worked with me, and the facilitators I appointed, for their excellent work in the period since our PrepCom in March, including the summer months where valuable holidays were sacrificed for this noble goal. This truly exemplifies the commitment and dedication on your part to achieve a meaningful outcome, shared by all.

And I thank you for entrusting me with the responsibility to preside over this important meeting. I intend to continue working in an open and transparent manner. I count on your continued trust and support in our joint endeavour.

Thank you.

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