

ILLCIT TRAFFICKING IN SMALL ARMS

AFRICAN REGIONAL WORKSHOP

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LOME – TOGO

STATEMENT BY MR JAYANTHA DHANAPALA

UNDER-SECRETARY GENERAL

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**DELIVERED BY THE DIRECTOR OF THE UNITED NATIONS REGIONAL CENTRE
FOR PEACE AND DISARMAMENT IN AFRICA,**

MR. IVOR RICHARD FUNG.

Mr. Prime Minister,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I wish to thank to thank the Government and people of Togo for their co-operation in holding this workshop to conduct important consultations on the magnitude and scope of

illicit arms traffic and ways of curbing it. My special gratitude goes to you Mr. Prime Minister for opening this meeting in person and thereby placing it high on the list of your priorities. Lome has a distinguished tradition of hosting events of international and sub-regional importance. This workshop itself is being held close at the heels of the recently concluded Peace Agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front, successfully brokered by Togo in these very premises.

The consultations we are embarking on are intended to provide us with a better understanding of the factors and features which are unique to the continent of Africa when it comes to assessing the magnitude and scope of illicit arms traffic world wide. We are looking for both information and insights which would enable us to identify elements of commonality and distinctness between other parts of the world affected by illicit arms traffic and this continent. Africa itself is the world's lowest manufacturer of weapons but is subjected repeatedly to the consequences of their wrongful uses. We are here to listen to you and have the benefit of your experience and expertise.

Your discussions here would be our guide posts for highlighting those aspects of the illicit arms traffic which originate in and affect Africa. I encourage you to look back in identifying the roots of the problem and look ahead in finding practical ways of overcoming it. I say so in the knowledge that the political climate is very promising for supporting the initiatives which originate in the areas directly affected by illicit arms traffic. African concerns over the direct and indirect consequences of illicit arms traffic come very high on the global agenda now whether we discuss security, development, refugees or humanitarian assistance. The General Assembly, the Security Council and the Secretary-General, each within their own competence, have given special attention to African concerns in the area of illicit arms traffic and called for speedy action to address them.

While official arms purchases in Africa have significantly fallen in recent years, there has been a dramatic increase in the illicit flow of arms in and within the region. This situation has exacerbated the problems of insecurity and political destabilisation of many countries in the region. Economic and social progress has slowed down particularly in those societies that are emerging from armed conflicts and unresolved domestic tensions. Some of those societies have, in fact, relapsed into conflict as a direct result of small arms accumulation and their easy availability to groups and individuals operating outside the reach of legitimate state authority. There are situations when civil society is both a victim and perpetrator of illicit arms traffic. Indeed, one of the most painful and devastating

consequences of small arms proliferation is the growing phenomenon of using children as carriers of contraband trade.

The upside of the current situation is a promising convergence of initiatives by Africans themselves to curb and monitor illicit arms traffic. A number of measures and mechanisms, have been put in place by the OAU, sub-regional organisations, groups, individual states and civil society organisations within and outside Africa to address the situation. At its 35th Conference of Heads of State and Government in Algiers two weeks ago, the OAU following up on its earlier commitment in Ouagadougou, adopted the resolution on small arms proliferation which, *inter alia* calls for the organisation of a ministerial conference on the issue by the year 2000. This is a welcome development which the United Nations intends to support through its Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa.

Among the many practical measures undertaken by sub-regional organisations to curb the increase of the proliferation of light weapons in the continent, one can cite the efforts deployed by the Southern African Development Community (SADC), with the support of the civil society organisations in the region. Mention must be made of the important work carried out by the trilateral commission made up of Mozambique, Swaziland and South Africa. Similarly, Cameroon, Central African Republic and Chad have put up joint efforts to fight highway banditry. In October last year, the Member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) adopted the historic declaration establishing the regime of a Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of light weapons in West Africa. The United Nations system provides support for the consolidation of this regime through the Programme for Co-ordination and Assistance for Security and Development. Added to these sub-regional efforts are the many initiatives of individual Member States at the national level in most cases supported by the civil society to check the indiscriminate flow of small arms. The examples of the churches in Mozambique and the community groups in Mali are noteworthy and should be encouraged. Like Mali in 1996, and South Africa recently, Liberia is implementing a weapon destruction process which involved the disposal of some 31,000 small arms and about 2,000,000 ammunition. These are major practical disarmament initiatives on the continent with the potential of consolidating post conflict peace and development programmes.

In the next few days , you will be focussing your deliberations on three vast but neatly delineated areas which constitute the essence of General Assembly Resolution 53/77

which requests the Secretary- General to hold broad based consultations on :

1. the magnitude and scope of the phenomenon of illicit trafficking in small arms.
2. Possible measures to combat illicit trafficking in and illicit circulation of small arms, including those suited to indigenous regional approaches.
3. Role of the United Nations in collecting, collaring, sharing and disseminating information on illicit trafficking in small arms.

I am confident that as challenging a task as it is, you would carry it out successfully. I extend you my best wishes.

Allow me, at this juncture, also to say that your meeting is at the same time the celebration of the relaunch and revitalisation of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa. It was in these same premises here in Lomé, that you, Member States of the Organisation of African Unity meeting in the context of a ministerial conference on security, development and disarmament in Africa in 1985 requested the United Nations General Assembly to establish this regional office. The Centre experienced operational difficulties in the past few years, owing to Member States inability to make voluntary contributions on the basis of which it operates. I am grateful that you, Member States, have again taken the decision to revitalise the Centre and to provide it with the necessary resources. Your decision indeed, has been followed by the Secretary-General's reforms which give regional disarmament pre-eminence in our effort. Let me seize this opportunity to thank the Government of Togo for its relentless effort to support the Centre. I am also grateful to all the Member States that have contributed financially to support the revitalisation effort and I wish to assure you that the revitalised Centre has regional and practical disarmament high on its work programme.

Thus, the outcome of your deliberation at this workshop would be followed up closely on the field and at headquarters.

I wish you success in your deliberations.