

# Keynote Address

By

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## **Regional Preparatory Meeting for the 2001 United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects**

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### **Introduction**

Allow me at the outset to congratulate and thank the Government of Brazil for taking the initiative in organizing this important regional meeting. I would like also to acknowledge the contribution of the Lima-based UN Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, and to express my gratitude to those member states that are supporting its operation.

Last September, the United Nations hosted the largest-ever gathering of heads of state and government on the occasion of the Millennium Summit. It is noteworthy that the historic and inspirational UN Millennium Declaration that resulted from that Summit called upon the international community "to take concerted action to end illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons." On 7 September, the UN Security Council, also meeting at the level of heads of state and government, issued its own Declaration calling for "effective international action to prevent the illegal flow of small arms into areas of conflict." Earlier, on 27 March, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's Millennium Report drew specific attention to the global security threats posed by illicit traffic in such weapons and underscored the need for prompt action by the international community to address these threats.

This meeting is also timely in that it is occurring prior to the second session of the PrepCom for the 2001 UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. It thus provides an important opportunity for countries in the region to discuss and coordinate a regional approach to the issues on the agenda of that Conference. Though this illicit trade has truly become a global "problem without a passport," the importance of regional

meetings in addressing this threat cannot be overstated. Each region clearly has its own unique characteristics that must be considered in crafting effective responses to this global challenge. The basic challenge will be to ensure that these unique interests are advanced within a wider context of global norms based on principles at the heart of the UN Charter, including -- but by no means limited to -- the legitimate right of self defence.

### **The problem**

Given the potential effects upon humanity and the environment from the use of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, the world must continue to place the total global elimination of such weapons at the top of the international security agenda. Upon receiving his Nobel Peace Prize in 1987, Oscar Arias warned that:

*Today the world is divided between those who live in terror of being destroyed in a nuclear war, and those dying daily in wars of conventional arms. This terror of the final war is so great as to engender a frightening insensitivity to the proliferation and use of non-atomic arms.*

Today, international attention is at long last being directed at the highest levels of government to the need for action in alleviating the threats to human security posed by the misuse of small arms and light weapons -- weapons that have in many countries been destroying the masses. The results of this ongoing crisis have left an extraordinary legacy of death and destruction -- including more human casualties than have been produced from past uses of weapons of mass destruction. It has resulted in an estimated 5 million deaths during last decade and is still reportedly causing about 300,000 casualties every year in the world.

We must not lose sight of the global context. We live in a world of rapidly rising global military expenditures after the decline of the post Cold War years. One estimate of the volume of the arms trade in 1999 is \$ 53,4 billion.

This trade is rising to meet the demands of combatants and criminals alike. The excessive accumulation and misuse of such weaponry has resulted in the destruction of lives and properties, undermining human security, destabilizing societies, and in turn, destroying the prospect for socio-economic development. The global abundance and easy availability of small arms and light weapons reinforces a cycle of violence and under-development. Even more tragically, their victims frequently include the innocent, including countless women and children. This illicit trade has truly become one of the key challenges to peace, security and development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### **International efforts and regional initiatives in the Latin America and the Caribbean**

The problem is complex, multifaceted, and global in scope. It is a problem that requires overarching, collective, and integrated solutions -- solutions that require a combination of disarmament, security, socio-economic as well as humanitarian measures. This need has been recognised more and more by Governments, the United Nations, other international organizations, and throughout civil society.

Fortunately, this ongoing crisis has also stimulated constructive and highly commendable actions at the regional level, and Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the regions most affected by the flows of small arms and light weapons across the globe. In this region, the small arms issue is related to organized crime, drug-trafficking and internal violence. In fact, countries in this region, individually or collectively and working with others, have been leading the international efforts in combating the scourge of small arms.

An excellent example of this work was the conclusion of the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials, which entered into force in 1998. This was a major achievement for the state members of the OAS and 11 countries have so far ratified it. I would encourage those states that have not yet ratified it to become parties soon.

In addition, the model regulations for the control of the international movement of firearms, their parts, components and ammunition -- adopted by the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission of the OAS -- offer another illustration of this progress. The Declaration signed in April 1998 by the Presidents of the member States of the Common Market of the Southern Cone, and of Bolivia and Chile, is yet another constructive initiative. And in June 1999, the first Summit Conference of Heads of State and Government of Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Union was held in Rio de Janeiro -- an event that also focused international attention on problems associated with the destabilizing accumulation of small arms and light weapons.

Countries in the region have adopted other concrete measures, including those aimed at strengthening multilateral and bilateral cooperation in numerous key areas. These include the harmonization of national legislation, policy coordination, the creation of a joint register of suppliers and buyers, the expansion of information-sharing, joint training activities, and the encouragement of closer cooperation among law-enforcement agencies, including police, customs, and border control officials.

In addition to these regional and sub-regional measures, there are the many initiatives of individual Member States at the national and local level, in many cases supported by the civil society, aimed at reducing and controlling the flow and availability of small arms and light

weapons in society. These include steps to adopt and strengthen relevant national laws and regulations, measures to ensure safer weapon storage, and weapons collecting, confiscating and destruction programmes.

These pioneering initiatives are providing a powerful framework for collective action to curb the illicit use and trafficking in small arms. In earning the applause of the world community, they may also offer a useful precedent or model to be considered by other regions and States.

I am glad to note that the UN, particularly through the work of the Lima Centre, has contributed to the development and implementation of such initiatives and stands ready to support additional activities at the regional and national levels. The Lima Centre has organized workshops with the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission to promote the adoption of the "Model Regulations for the Control of the International Movement of Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunitions." This cooperation will soon include a "training the trainers" programme to combat illicit arms trade. The Lima Centre also maintains a "Regional Clearinghouse on Firearms, Ammunitions and Explosives" and is working with the UN Drug Control Programme and the UN Development Programme on a firearms control initiative in Metropolitan Lima. Furthermore, the Chilean Government has officially requested the Lima Centre to organise jointly a follow-up conference to the 2001 UN Conference.

These actions -- combined with other international and other regional initiatives now underway in many other countries around the world -- are providing a foundation to support an emerging global regime to control, reduce and finally eliminate the illicit flow and accumulation of small arms and light weapons. The vision of comprehensive global regime to control small arms will continue to animate the minds of people longing for peace, security and development, and will inspire further efforts and initiatives.

### **2001 UN Conference and its preparatory process**

As our economies and societies become increasingly influenced by the forces of global interdependence and globalization, it becomes all the more important for all members of the international community -- from the level of civil society to heads of state and government -- to reaffirm their collective determination to work together in alleviating the many tragedies produced by this deadly trade in small arms.

The decision by the General Assembly to convene the 2001 Conference is a collective acknowledgement of the need for a global response by Member States to the challenge posed by small arms and light weapons. The Conference will provide an opportunity for participating states to deliberate and forge a consensus on effective measures to address this chronic global threat.

This need for concrete action was recently underscored by Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who stated the following in his Millennium Report:

*The many recent expressions of concern about small arms proliferation are a welcome sign that the importance of the issue is being recognized, but words alone do nothing to prevent the ongoing slaughter of innocent people. Dialogue is critical [he added], but we must match the rhetoric of concern with the substance of practical action.*

The 2001 UN Conference is the forum where states will have the chance to translate solemn words into constructive deeds. Next July, the international community must seize the opportunity to demonstrate its political will and commitment to reverse the trend by adopting firm commitments and putting them into action. This will of course not be easy, given the complexity of the challenge posed by the spread of small arms and light weapons -- collectively, we should expect no quick fixes, no magic answers. But with determination and perseverance, we can find the right approach to start tackling the problem in a comprehensive and effective manner.

I have no doubt that the countries of Latin-America and the Caribbean will contribute significantly to a successful outcome of the Conference. Their full and active participation in the work of the PrepCom will be crucial in ensuring the success of the Conference. Decisions on some of the procedural issues related to the Conference -- such as venue and date of the Conference -- have already been made during the current session of the General Assembly. The Chairman of the PrepCom, Ambassador Dos Santos, has been conducting informal consultations on other procedural issues, such as provisions in the draft rules of procedure on decision making and modalities of attendance of NGOs in the Conference and the Prepcom. He is continuing his efforts to resolve these issues as soon as possible.

I sincerely hope that the forthcoming second session (between 8-19 January 2001) of the PrepCom, while striving to resolve the remaining procedural issues, will focus on matters of substance, in particular a Programme of Action to be adopted by the Conference. As mandated by the Member States, the Chairman of the PrepCom and the Secretariat are working hard in an effort to "flesh out" the paper entitled "Structure and Elements for a Programme of Action to Prevent, combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects" in order to make it available to delegations at the second PrepCom.

I believe that all delegations, in particular those from the Latin-American and Caribbean region, will respond positively and constructively to that important paper and will make valuable contributions to its further development.

## **Conclusion**

As is always the case in searching for collective solutions to complex global problems, there is no substitute for patience, understanding, determination, and perseverance. Decisions on effective action must be taken, while addressing, to the greatest extent possible, genuine concerns by all the parties.

The UN Department of Disarmament Affairs and the Lima Centre will continue to work closely with all States in their bid to ensure a successful outcome for the 2001 UN Conference. We will do our best to ensure that this conference will be a major step forward by the international community in meeting the challenge posed by the illicit flow and excessive accumulation of small arms and light weapons.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish now to extend to you my very best wishes for a successful outcome of this important regional preparatory meeting, an outcome which may -- in ways we may not yet be fully able to appreciate -- improve prospects for the all-important conference in 2001.