

Keynote Address, Session I

**Coordinating Regional Initiatives of the United Nations  
Programme of Action on Small Arms**

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**Introduction: The Indispensability of Coordination**

My topic today -- "coordinating regional initiatives on the Programme of Action on small arms" -- relates very much to one of the fundamental purposes of the United Nations. Under its Charter, the UN is to serve as "a center for harmonizing the actions of nations" in the attainment of their

common ends. Since the subject of this opening session is part of a much larger challenge facing the world community, I would like to begin by addressing directly this important theme of coordination.

Today, the advocates of disarmament and multilateral arms control are confronting unprecedented challenges. This community is increasingly acknowledging the importance of synergy, as pursued through the coordination of disarmament-related activities at all levels of governance, both vertically -- at the national, to sub-regional, regional, and global levels -- and also horizontally, among the extraordinarily diverse groups within civil society both within and across existing national boundaries. And finally, this community recognizes the importance of timely and reliable information -- and communication -- in achieving its fundamental goals.

My theme today is thus very simple and brief -- the world community's ability to succeed in solving the chronic problems associated with the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons, and the excess production or stockpiling of such arms, requires in effect a "revolution in arms control affairs." Just as the revolution in military affairs has carefully avoided focusing exclusively on weapons, so too must participants in the revolution in arms control affairs devote greater attention to improving coordination, communication, and technical cooperation between the many diverse entities that are working for peace not through the perfection or accumulation of weapons -- but by strengthening controls over some weapons (like small arms) or the working for the total elimination of others (namely, weapons of mass destruction). These are the truly revolutionary challenges all of us face who work in this difficult field.

I make this appeal because, frankly speaking, I fear for the future of a global disarmament agenda without such cooperation. In a world awash in weapons, and with mounting military expenditures globally, a selfish *sauve qui peut* response, picking and choosing from the menu of multilateral disarmament, is the least productive of all possible remedies.

We must adapt global arms control and disarmament efforts to local circumstances. Yet if we want to make real progress in addressing the small arms threat, there is no substitute for ensuring that our various national and regional efforts are consistent with our collective global goals as laid out in the Programme of Action, which provides a solid working framework for the pursuit by national and regional organizations of unambiguous global norms.

### **The Number and Diversity of Regional Approaches**

It is inspiring to witness the outpouring of initiatives at the national and regional levels both leading up to and following the 2001 UN Conference on Small Arms. The Annex of the Programme of Action lists some 55 separate regional and subregional efforts to address this challenge, many of them in the African continent. The ECOWAS Moratorium on light weapons adopted in 1998, the Nairobi Declaration adopted in March 2000, the Bamako Declaration adopted in December 2000 and the SADC Protocol on Firearms adopted last year are examples of African initiatives. It is said that actions speak louder than words, and this list provides some

reassurance that States and regional organizations are taking the Programme of Action quite seriously indeed. Also encouraging is the fact that many of the Programme of Action's 30 proposed initiatives at the national and regional levels are already underway.

These efforts derive their momentum from a recognition in all countries of the terrible human costs associated with this illicit trade, particularly the costs to civilian populations, including women, children, and refugees. Small arms and light weapons do indeed have some important legitimate uses in maintaining domestic order and other legal activities. These arms also do not alone cause the underlying conflicts in which they are used. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that the illicit trade and mismanagement of these weapons can serve to perpetuate or to aggravate low-level conflicts -- for 40 years in the case of Colombia, 25 years in Angola, and 20 years in Afghanistan, for example. Often in conflicts of this nature genuine political or socio economic grievances become entangled with efforts to acquire personal profits through protection money, bribes, monopolistic control of trade, the exploitation of labour and claims to land. In these cases war becomes a "means" rather than an "end" and greed takes over from grievance.

Many of the actors who benefit from the illicit trade, including organized crime, arms brokers, drug traffickers and terrorists, cannot be dealt with at the state level alone. Many of the problems associated with the proliferation of small arms and light weapons transcend state borders and affect their neighbours as well as entire regions. Efforts to achieve economic development, to promote regional peace and security, to eradicate the illicit trade in narcotics, to stop money laundering, to fight terrorism, and to combat organized crime are all profoundly influenced by this illicit trade.

Just as these were the precisely the concerns that ultimately led to a consensus on the Programme of Action, so too will the fear of the worsening of these conditions serve as a strong inducement to implement this Programme at all levels of government.

It is important to point out that the outcome document - being a political declaration - does not restrict Member States. On the contrary, it insists that Member States, Regional Organizations and NGOs take the lead and develop initiatives beyond the Programme of Action. It is, therefore, best seen as a framework outlining specific initiatives for implementation at the national, regional, and global levels -- at a pace the organizations at each of these levels can best accommodate.

## **The Role of the United Nations**

The United Nations Secretariat, at Headquarters or in the field through its Regional Centres for Peace and Disarmament, has an important role to play in promoting this process as the world proceeds further down the path of implementation. Its goal is to help in creating a self-sustaining dynamic and to facilitate cooperation among States, sub-regional and regional organizations on all relevant issues. In this context, we will initiate and or strengthen as much as possible our

support to the OAU/African Union, SADC, ECOWAS, ECCAS, the Parties to the Nairobi Declaration and others in stepping up efforts towards effective implementation of the UN Programme of Action adopted last July in New York.

There are two points to keep in mind throughout this challenging process of implementation: first, the importance of the long-term sustainability of actions taken, and second, the need for a genuine sense of "ownership" of the initiatives undertaken in the most-affected countries and regions. Policies must derive from the perspective of the states and regions that are recovering from conflicts or seeking to prevent their spread. Their views must be taken into account when donors and agencies intervene. That is what genuine partnership means in meeting the needs of countries that require capacity building and other forms of assistance.

This leads to the question, how do we generate harmonized action within and between states -- in short, how can we exploit the benefits of synergy? We in the UN Secretariat consider that encouraging and assisting states and regions in capacity building will be one of our top priorities.

The Regional Centres of the Department of Disarmament Affairs are well placed to assist in these areas. They are already deeply involved in cooperating with States and regional and sub-regional organizations in some of the most affected regions. Since the conclusion of the Conference, the UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (whose energetic Director -- Ivor Fung -- is here with us) has been providing support in the formulation of small arms collection projects to a number of Member States in Africa -- including Guinea Bissau, Niger, Cameroon, Chad, the Central African Republic and Togo where it assisted in the destruction of several hundreds of small arms last October. In addition, in order to harness the capacity of African states in the control of the proliferation of small arms, the Regional Centre launched, in collaboration with UNDP and with the financial contribution of the Swiss Government, a capacity-building project for the 10 member states of the Nairobi Declaration in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region. The first training programme took place in Nairobi from 15 to 30 November 2001. In the coming weeks, a similar capacity building programme will be launched in Yaounde, Cameroon, for the benefit of the eleven member States of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). Again, with the support of the Government of Switzerland, the Regional Centre in Lome has now completed a one-year study on the "Illicit Routes and Caches of Small Arms in Africa".

In Latin America, the Lima Regional Centre -- through its Regional Clearing-house Programme -- has become a nexus for regional cooperation and knowledge sharing. The Centre is working on various levels to encourage and facilitate the implementation of the Programme of Action in the Region. Planned follow-up to the Conference includes a heavy schedule of training, workshops, seminars and practical support, often in collaboration with regional organizations or UN agencies. The Centre, with the Government of Chile, organized a seminar on Evaluation and Follow-up of the Conference from 19 to 21 November in Santiago, Chile, and another seminar with the OAS Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission on "The Application of the Model Regulations for the Control of the International Movement of Firearms, their Parts and

Components and Ammunition" from 26 to 28 February in Brasilia.

The Asia and Pacific Regional Centre -- currently operating at UN headquarters -- is organizing a regional follow-up conference for national and regional focal points which will focus on issues including import and export controls and marking, as well as the connection between the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and terrorism. The meeting will also address issues that were not resolved at the July Conference such as transfers to non-state actors and private ownership, in preparation for the 2006 review conference. Follow-up to the Conference was also discussed at the UN Conference on Disarmament Issues in Ishikawa-Kanazawa, Japan in late August 2001.

In the Central Asian region, the OSCE and the UN Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention organized the Bishkek International Conference, in Kyrgyzstan, which adopted an Action Programme that included measures to prevent the spread and illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons in that region.

At the Secretariat, we will be supporting both national and regional measures. We will also be involved in facilitating information sharing among Member States by organizing, collating and circulating information -- a responsibility given to DDA by the Programme of Action. This I regard as a key coordinating role. In this regard, we will identify clusters of related measures and input them into an easily accessible user friendly database. The goal is to make information readily available on such issues as what is being done in the areas of marking, safe storage, law enforcement, for example. This effort will rely heavily on Member States to contribute timely information.

The Department of Disarmament Affairs is the focal point for ensuring the UN system is providing coordinated and harmonized action. The issue of small arms and light weapons is not only a political and security problem -- it also has a humanitarian dimension, and each UN agency has a comparative advantage in their field. Recognizing this, the Secretary-General established the Coordinating Action on Small Arms (CASA)<sup>1</sup> mechanism in 1998, which brings together the no-less-than 17 UN departments, funds and agencies concerned with this issue. CASA played an important role in the lead-up to the Conference, and will continue to be involved in the implementation of the Programme of Action. It is best to work in coordination instead of each pursuing their goal separately.

## **Conclusion**

Ladies and gentlemen, the world community came together at the United Nations last year with a fundamental choice to make on small arms. It could adopt a Programme of Action, or it could respond with inaction. The very fact that the Programme exists and is now serving as a framework for initiatives like this very conference is a good indicator of a genuine commitment at all levels of government to work together in addressing this grave threat to international peace and security.

If states are merely spurred on to pursue a more vigorous implementation of their existing laws, regulations and agreements in this area -- this alone will do much to limit the illicit spread of small arms and light weapons. The response by both affected states and donor countries has so far been encouraging. At the UN Secretariat we recognize our responsibility to keep the momentum going.

I do not believe, however, that national actions alone will ultimately suffice to address the many dimensions of this common global threat. For many states, this will entail some adjustment to a new way of doing business -- one premised on the need to coordinate national efforts both regionally and globally. With this level of commitment, there is every reason to believe that the nations of the world will be able to accomplish far more than they can accomplish by acting alone. This is the concept of synergy at work, at the dawn of a new revolution in arms control affairs.

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1. The following departments and agencies are current members of CASA: the Department of Disarmament Affairs (DDA), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the Department for Political Affairs (DPA), the Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), the Department of Public Information (DPI) the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG/CAC), the New York Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), the New York Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Geneva-based United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), the Vienna-based Centre for International Crime Prevention (CICP), of the Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention (UNODCCP/CICP), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the World Bank, the World Health Organization (WHO), and the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP).