

## Opening Remarks

by  
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### **"UN-OSCE Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects in South Eastern Europe"**

Hosted by the Government of Slovenia

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Mr. Minister,  
Mr. Secretary-General,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the United Nations, I wish to thank the Government of Slovenia and in particular H.E. Dr. Dimitrij Rupel, Minister of Foreign Affairs, for his Government's cooperation in hosting this Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Lights Weapons in all its Aspects in South Eastern Europe.

I would also like to express my appreciation to H.E. Mr. Jan Kubiš, Secretary General of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for his personal support and his Organization's co-sponsorship of this event. And we are all grateful for the generous financial support from Germany, Hungary, and the Netherlands in making this Conference possible.

Not so long ago, small arms were largely the preoccupation of a handful of defence specialists, interest groups, and a few national leaders. Today, the level of public awareness of the threats posed by small arms has grown exponentially, along with the demand for action to alleviate these threats. At long last -- over 80 years after a single shot from a small arm in South Eastern Europe sparked a world war -- the security challenges arising from the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons are finally starting to get the attention they deserve throughout the world community.

This priority is certainly reflected in the work of the UN's Department of Disarmament Affairs (DDA) and other offices in the UN system. To harmonize these efforts, Secretary-General Kofi Annan established in 1998 the Coordinating Action on Small Arms (CASA) mechanism, which is headed by DDA. Our Department -- the smallest in the UN -- is collecting available national legislation and making it accessible on our web site. We are raising the level of public awareness through our symposia and publications. We are assisting in the establishment of a group of governmental experts to study the feasibility of an international instrument on marking and tracing small arms and light weapons. Working with other regional organizations and UN entities -- especially the UN Development Programme -- we have undertaken several field activities relating to stockpile management, weapons collection, and weapons destruction. And our efforts have only just begun, for we all know that many challenges lie ahead.

While the pursuit of such arms may well reflect conflicts that are deeply rooted in the social and political fabric of states, this illicit market does have its own independent effects upon the scope, duration, and human impact of such conflicts. The special characteristics of these weapons -- including their relatively simple production technology, their often uncontrolled or illegal sale, their portability and concealability, their ease of use, and their long shelf life -- all hinder the pursuit of peace. This is precisely why such weapons have now risen so rapidly on the international security agenda.

Over the years, both supply and demand pressures have caused legal arms exports to grow and burgeoning stockpiles have made it difficult for many states to prevent the diversion of arms to illicit markets. While an estimated 639 million small arms are in circulation, over 40 percent of the companies producing small arms are in Europe. There is also a thriving illicit international trade in small arms and light weapons that has had the effect of perpetuating intra-State wars, increasing the risk of terrorism, setting back economic development, and contributing to the deaths of thousands upon thousands of civilians. These weapons kill irrespective of gender, age, nationality, political persuasion, or race. Confronting such threats, Secretary-General Kofi Annan has aptly termed the illicit trade in such weapons "a global scourge."<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, however, events have clearly moved in a more auspicious direction. The watershed event, of course, was the convening in July 2001 of the UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects. The Programme of Action adopted at that Conference is now serving as a roadmap to assist states everywhere in addressing this global challenge. The participants recognized the value of norms that are flexible enough to apply readily to local conditions. The Conference, in short, put the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons "in all its aspects" firmly on the UN agenda and brought it in a compelling fashion to the world's attention.

For our purposes today, it is particularly important to underscore the extent to which the Programme of Action focused on regional initiatives. The forms of these initiatives vary across different regions but include such measures as -- new regional mechanisms to reinforce international customs cooperation; networks for information sharing among law enforcement, border and customs control agencies; as well as strengthened legislative frameworks and improvements in stockpile management.

Such forms of regional cooperation are by no means limited to official government circles. I would like to emphasize the vital contributions from civil society in tackling the many problems relating to the illicit trade in SALW. There now is no longer any doubt that NGOs will have a vital role to play in developing a sustainable regional approach to controlling the illicit spread of small arms.

Given the many diverse local conditions that shape the global small arms problem, it is not surprising that results of the various control efforts would often vary -- country by country, and region by region. In this respect, regional approaches serve as bridges between solemn global norms and the practical realities of day-to-day implementation. This notion of a bridge lies at the heart of Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, which recognizes clearly the contributions of regional arrangements in advancing the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Since the July 2001 Conference, DDA has organized many gatherings on this issue in various regions and sub-regions of the world as we prepare for the July 2003 biennial meeting in New York. Earlier this year, for example, I attended the Asia-Pacific Regional Seminar in Bali, Indonesia, on the Implementation of the Program of Action. It is particularly gratifying today to see the many ways that Europe has stepped forward to show its determination to address this challenge to international peace and security, as seen in a number of complementary international agreements in this field sponsored by the UN, OSCE, the European Union, and NATO.

Additional progress can be expected on the European arms control scene, as more states commit themselves to European instruments -- such as the EU Code of Conduct and Joint Action on SALW, the Regulation on export controls for dual-use goods, and the Code of Conduct on conventional arms exports -- as well as several international export control régimes.

This is, I might add, the first time that DDA is partnering with OSCE to review the progress made in implementing the Programme of Action. As one of the primary institutions responsible for security in Europe, the OSCE has demonstrated its vision and leadership in developing transparency, oversight, and control programs to monitor light weapons. These efforts are epitomized by the 2000 OSCE Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons.

For its part, the United Nations has a strong and abiding interest in addressing weapons issues in the South Eastern European Region, as illustrated by DDA's efforts to advance a "weapons-for development" project in Albania. Responding to a request by the Government of Albania in 1998 and in consultation with local authorities, DDA devised an unprecedented programme (implemented by UNDP) in which the local community collected and voluntarily surrendered weapons, in exchange for the implementation of UN-sponsored development projects benefiting the community as a whole. The Gramsh project collected about 6,000 weapons and 137 metric tons of ammunition.<sup>2</sup> An earlier UN weapons collection effort in Croatia gathered 8,356 rifles, 6,083 anti-tank rocket launchers, 13,573 grenades, and almost 2 million rounds of ammunition in 1996 and 1997.<sup>3</sup>

Even recognizing that such collection efforts have a long way to go in reducing the voluminous stocks of illicit weaponry, ventures like these not only remove many deadly weapons from circulation -- they also have considerable symbolic value in inspiring further efforts to deal with this problem. It is therefore not surprising that the weapons-for-development concept has since been mainstreamed into disarmament efforts and the idea has expanded to assist affected communities in many different parts of the world.

As I visit this region once again, it is gratifying indeed to see that legislation is being developed along the lines envisaged by the Programme of Action. Some organizations have already started examining possible standards for end-use certification and verification of small arms. We have also seen an increased focus on the promotion of technology for marking and tracing, and various international gatherings have highlighted efforts to confront illicit brokering.

Such developments complement efforts that are already under way in the context of the Stability Pact to establish a comprehensive, long-term conflict prevention strategy for this region. As these efforts succeed in promoting cooperation in security sector reform, enhancing transparency, and promoting progress in arms control and non-proliferation -- the improved security environment will no doubt lead to additional progress in the small arms field as well. Together, these mutually-reinforcing initiatives will help enormously in enhancing stability throughout this region.

Like so many other regions and sub-regions, South Eastern Europe has had its own unique history in dealing with small arms challenges. It is the home of many producers of such arms and ammunition for internal use and for export. It has had its own struggles against illicit arms brokers and in dealing with the proverbial "grey market" transactions. It faces its own difficulties

in implementing strict controls at national frontiers. And of course, the illicit trade in such weapons has had its own tragic effects upon civilians in this region.

Given all the many complexities of this issue, the goals for tDDay's conference appear deceptively simple. "*The challenge ahead*" -- as Secretary-General, Kofi Annan once put it - "*is to convert words into deeds, an effort that must involve all levels of society -- from the global community to the individual citizen.*" By bringing together representatives of governments, regional institutions, the United Nations family, and civil society to share their respective perspectives and experiences in converting the noble principles of the Programme of Action into concrete accomplishments -- this Conference has already taken a long step in meeting this solemn challenge.

The meeting that DDA convened yesterday with its regional partners represents yet another step forward in international cooperation. I view such events not as one-time affairs, but as steps along a process of promoting cooperation on a variety of fronts. It is through such gatherings that professional contacts are made, new lessons are learned, and international policy communities gradually emerge. As this Conference narrows its focus to technical issues, let us not forget the very human dimension of this important work.

In closing, I can think of no better way to launch this Conference than by quoting Slovenia's great poet, France Prešeren, who authored the following lines of Slovenia's national anthem --

*God's blessing on all nations,  
Who long and work for that bright day,  
When o'er earth's habitation  
No war, no strife shall hold its sway;  
Who long to see  
That all man free  
No more shall foes, but neighbours be.*

With this very much in mind, I wish you success in all your deliberations.

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<sup>1</sup> Foreword, *Small Arms Survey 2002*, Oxford University Press, New York 2002

<sup>2</sup> *Small Arms Survey 2002*, p. 302.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 291.