

Opening Remarks

by

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Open-ended Working Group to negotiate an international instrument to enable States to identify and trace, in a timely and reliable manner, illicit small arms and light weapons

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Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me, at the outset, to extend to all of you a warm welcome to the Open-ended Working Group to negotiate an international instrument to enable States to identify and trace, in a timely and reliable manner, illicit small arms and light weapons.

The establishment of this Working Group by General Assembly Resolution 58/241 is a testimony to the international community's determination to develop international norms to fight illicit small arms and light weapons.

The problem of illicit small arms and light weapons has global dimensions. The excessive accumulation, uncontrolled spread and misuse of these arms pose a serious threat to peace and stability in many regions of the world and have a wide range of humanitarian and socio-economic consequences at the local, national, regional and international levels.

Problems such as the illicit flow of unmarked weapons and the lack of accurate registration and records are among the factors that facilitate the continuation of armed conflicts, the destabilization of post-conflict situations, the perpetration of crime and violations of Security Council embargoes.

The world has already shown its determination to address, in a comprehensive way, the marking and tracing of small arms and light weapons. The governments of France and Switzerland, for example, launched their joint initiative in March 2001. So did various other initiatives carried out at the regional and sub-regional levels.

Multilaterally, States have also addressed the issue of tracing in the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunitions, which supplements the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

In the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons, States identified tracing illicit small arms and light weapons as a key element of the global efforts to address the challenge posed by such weapons and undertook to enhance their cooperation in this regard.

Most pertinent for our present purposes, is the work of the Group of Governmental Experts on Tracing Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons, which was established by the Secretary-General to assist him in studying the feasibility of an international instrument on tracing small arms and light weapons. The study prepared by this Group of Experts offers a good starting point for the task mandated to this Open-ended Working Group. I thank all the members of that Group of Governmental Experts for their invaluable contribution.

The report of the Group of Experts found an international instrument on tracing to be not only feasible, but also desirable for a number of reasons: it will help to strengthen international standards and practices to promote international cooperation; to enhance existing international and regional agreements; and to promote more responsible behaviour to address the excessive and uncontrolled spread of illicit weapons in many regions of the world.

Distinguished Delegates,

This first substantive session will be a valuable opportunity to hear views on the various technical aspects and the difficult elements of tracing illicit small arms and light weapons that States, NGOs, and international and regional organizations are here to share. I hope that in the course of your negotiations, you will be guided by the imperative need to bridge the different views so that, working together, the international community can make this important leap forward, towards the elimination of the scourge of illicit small arms and light weapons. I wish you success in your negotiations.