



Statement by the Under-Secretary General for Disarmament Affairs,
Mr. Nobuyasu Abe, to the United Nations Preparatory Committee of the
Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of
Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light
Weapons in All Its Aspects

9 January 2006

Mr. Chairman,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You have gathered here today to start your work on the preparations for the Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. This is a challenging task: you need to build consensus on key recommendations to the Review Conference while ensuring that the Review Conference has the depth and latitude necessary to address all the important issues of concern to the international community and to produce a valuable outcome for the implementation of the Programme of Action. The 2001 Programme of Action is an enabling instrument, not subject to renegotiation here or at the Conference in June. Your task in reviewing its implementation deserves a rigorous and honest appraisal that should embolden you to make greater and increased efforts to effectively fulfill its objectives.

Combating the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons is a long-term challenge. While significant progress has been made since the adoption of the Programme of Action in 2001, we should not lose sight of the fact that these weapons still represent a massive problem for the world community. They continue to kill, maim and threaten men and women and children every day, cause human misery and suffering, destabilize States and entire regions and hamper their political, economic and social development.

Mr. Chairman,

Since its adoption in 2001, the Programme of Action has led to a heightened awareness of the small arms and light weapons problem and fostered an unprecedented rise in actions by governmental and intergovernmental institutions as well as civil society. This is evidenced by the huge increase in activities carried out at the national level, the high level of commitment demonstrated by States and civil society during the Biennial Meetings of States that were held in 2003 and 2005, as well as the high volume of national reports: 103 national reports were submitted to the Department for Disarmament Affairs for each of the Biennial Meetings. We should also commend the efforts being made at the regional and sub-regional levels to promote dialogue, common understandings and enhanced cooperation among States, to create or strengthen sub-regional and/or regional institutions to assist States in building their capacity to implement the Programme of Action and other relevant instruments. DDA was involved in a number of these initiatives including three workshops on transfer control criteria and guidelines on firearms import, export and transfers aimed at assisting the Caribbean States and Andean Community States as well as MERCOSUR States in identifying practical recommendations on transfer controls in their region; the organization of a similar workshop in Colombo, Sri Lanka, aimed at the South Asian States; the establishment of the ECOWAS small arms programme (ECOSAP); and the establishment of the Regional Centre on Small Arms in the Horn of Africa and Great Lakes Region of Africa.

At the global level, I underscore the efforts made by States to negotiate the international instrument to enable States to identify and trace, in a timely and reliable manner, illicit small arms and light weapons, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 8 December 2005. This is the first international instrument being negotiated in the context of the Programme of Action. It is now important to ensure that it is implemented rapidly, effectively and fully.

I am also pleased with the recent advances in addressing the issue of illicit brokering in small arms and light weapons. The results of the broad-based consultations

mandated by the General Assembly show that there is a wide recognition that international action to control brokering activities is critical to the success of the efforts to curb the proliferation of illicit SALW. In this regard, the Secretary-General, as mandated by the General Assembly, will establish a Group of Governmental Experts to consider further steps to enhance international cooperation to prevent, combat and eradicate illicit brokering in SALW. The Group will begin its activities after the Review Conference.

Another important development is the entry into force, on 3 July 2005, of the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition (The United Nations Firearms Protocol), which supplements the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. In this connection, I urge all States that have not done so to ratify this Protocol as soon as possible. The usefulness of the Protocol depends largely on the breadth of its acceptance and commitment to its implementation. I would also note other initiatives that have emerged since the adoption of the Programme of Action, such as, for example, the Transfer Control Initiative led by the United Kingdom, and the Arms Trade Treaty campaign, which has been promoted by a group of Nobel Peace Laureates and many NGOs.

I am also encouraged by the various consultations being undertaken at the regional and sub-regional levels in preparation for the Review Conference. In Africa, an agreement on an African Common Position has been reached at the expert level in Windhoek, Namibia, on 16 December 2005. This common position is expected to be approved at the 8th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council of the African Union to be held on 20-21 January 2006, in Khartoum, Sudan. The States of Latin America and the Caribbean are planning to hold regional consultations in April in Guatemala. Plans are also underway to hold similar consultations in other regions and sub-regions. The conclusions reached at such consultations will constitute valuable inputs to the Review Conference.

Mr. Chairman,

Within the United Nations, as we prepare for the Review Conference, we are assessing how we have played our role and what we need to change to improve the quality and effectiveness of our support and services to Member States, intergovernmental organizations and concerned civil society. During the past four and a half years the Department for Disarmament Affairs (DDA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) as well as other members of the UN family have provided support to national, sub-regional and regional initiatives to implement the Programme of Action. Much of those efforts have focused on capacity-building. This is critical to the countries most affected by the problem of illicit SALW, where the lack of capacity to develop and implement measures and activities to tackle the many dimensions of the problem constitutes a serious obstacle to their efforts to implement the Programme of Action.

Among others, several UN departments, UN programmes, funds and agencies have supported weapons collection and destruction programmes in Africa, Latin America and Southern Europe; the establishment and functioning of national coordinating bodies; projects to improve stockpile management, security and safety projects to address and mitigate the consequences of armed conflict on children; the development of measures to increase transparency in arms transfers, and the development and implementation of projects for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of former combatants in various countries, such as: Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Liberia, the Republic of Congo, Somalia and Sudan. In addition, we have assisted a large number of Member States in developing their capacity

for reporting on their implementation of the Programme of Action and have provided training for law enforcement officials, parliamentarians, members of national coordinating bodies and civil society organizations.

In order to maximize the capacity of the United Nations to provide a meaningful coordinated assistance to efforts to implement the Programme of Action, we have continued to invest considerable time and resources to improve the functioning of the Coordinating Action on Small Arms (CASA) mechanism and enhance its effectiveness. To this end, we have developed a comprehensive Internet Database aimed at improving the ability of CASA members to exchange information as well as to providing valuable data to Member States and the public in general. Furthermore, we have adopted a strategic framework for CASA which provides guidelines for systematic and coherent consultation and interagency cooperation in the field of SALW and we have begun a campaign aimed at making the mechanism more relevant in the field. We are hopeful that Member States will recognize our efforts and increase their support to the mechanism.

Efforts to reduce the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons must go hand-in-hand with initiatives in such fields as public health, safety and security, the protection of children, women and refugees, socio-economic development, DD&R, human rights and humanitarian assistance in the affected communities. In this context, I am encouraged by the recent adoption of General Assembly resolution 60/68, which addresses the negative humanitarian and development impact of the illicit manufacture, transfer and circulation of small arms and light weapons and their excessive accumulation. By emphasizing the multidimensional aspect of the small arms and light weapons problem this resolution reaffirms the very essence of the CASA mechanism.

Mr. Chairman,

In carrying out the review of progress made in the implementation of the Programme of Action, you should highlight the achievements but also focus on the constraints faced in the implementation; identify the shortcomings and learn from the experience gained and the lessons generated in the implementation process since 2001. You need to reflect on the effectiveness of our actions, especially in terms of how they actually impact those most affected by the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons; we need to ask what else needs to be done and how we can improve our performance; we need to ask ourselves very frankly: have we done enough?

I will end my remarks with the following quote from the United Nations Secretary-General, which I trust will inspire the work of this Preparatory Committee: “It is very encouraging to note that much progress has been made since the adoption of this document, but we must not relax our efforts to rid the world of the scourge of illicit small arms and light weapons, which continues to kill, maim and displace scores of thousands of innocent people every year.”