

**Statement of the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs**  
**At**  
**The Third Biennial Meeting of States**  
**14 July, 2008**

I declare open the Third Biennial Meeting of States to consider 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.

Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Third Biennial Meeting of States marks the 7<sup>th</sup> year of the implementation of the Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons. This process has not travelled an easy road, yet I am pleased to report that the international community's commitment to combat the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons remains as strong as it was in 2001.

Since 2001, over 430 national reports on the implementation of the Programme of Action have been submitted, highlighting the actions undertaken by States and civil society as well as the challenges faced. It is noteworthy that 146 States have reported on their implementation efforts at least once.

The national reports indicate varying degrees of progress. However, it is fair to conclude that progress has been made in the struggle against illicit small arms trafficking. Many governments have reviewed their legislation and regulations in order to better control the possession and transfers of small arms and light weapons.

The establishment of functional national coordination bodies in at least 100 countries has led to more coherent national small arms control policies. The importance of the national coordination bodies cannot be overstated. In many countries, through conducting national surveys, they have enhanced the understanding of the different aspects of the problems resulting from the illicit arms trade. They have also been a driving force behind the development of national action plans, which provide a long-term perspective and a basis for more effective interventions and much focused international cooperation and assistance. Additionally, States with functional national coordination bodies are

more active and engaged at regional and international fora addressing small arms related issues.

But the work done so far only scratches the surface of the problem. Concerted efforts are needed to build and strengthen national capacity:

- States need to ensure that national systems for the management and security of stockpiles are adequate, as poorly managed stockpiles form significant sources of diversion of weapons into illicit markets;
- National systems dealing with the import, export and transit of small arms, including systems for end-user certification, need to be strengthened and supported by competent and professional staff;
- Awareness-raising actions should continue, targeting diverse branches and levels of government and civil society; and
- States need to improve their capacity to identify and prioritize their needs in order to enhance the effectiveness of international assistance and cooperation.

National implementation to regulate illicit brokering in small arms and light weapons remains weak. As we speak, an unscrupulous broker may be violating a Security Council arms embargo somewhere in the world – recent research shows that all UN arms embargoes have been broken, and those activities are undertaken from anywhere in the world. I encourage you peruse the recent report – not only the recommendations – of the Group of Governmental Experts on illicit brokering in small arms and light weapons, which provides clear guidance for national legislation and regulations. The consequences of the activities of illicit brokers are not limited to weapon-producing States or transferring States only.

There is a need to broaden our perspective and improve our understanding of the root causes of the illicit small arms trade, including lagging social and economic development. States wanting to book results in the fight against the illicit arms trade will need to look at supply and demand, at security and development, at end-use verification and corruption.

The United Nations Development Programme reports that countries plagued by armed violence in situations of crime or conflict often perform poorly in terms of achieving the Millennium Development Goals. It is therefore necessary to address the small arms issue within the broader development context. I am thus following closely the evolution of the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development to which an increasing number of States are adhering.

Moreover, the negative impact of illicit arms trade including crime violence is particularly relevant for women and girls who are often gravely affected. Conversely, women remain the much-needed agents of change. Therefore, effective policies aimed at preventing illicit arms from trickling into societies need to take into account gender issues while developing alternative livelihoods for those coping with disempowerment and despair.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Biennial Meeting of States is a special one. It is one to which States have come determined to produce an outcome that will pave the way for an improved implementation of the Programme of Action. Also, at this meeting, for the first time States will consider the implementation of the International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons. This is an important tool for combating the trafficking of small arms and deserves the support of all Member States.

We should also seize the opportunity of this Meeting to think about ways to improve the implementation process of the Programme of Action. There is room for enhancing the synergies between regional and global initiatives by making it a practice for regional organizations to perhaps, meet every other year – to discuss ways and means of translating the results of the preceding biennial meeting into regional action plans, exchange good practices, and prepare for national reporting to the next Biennial Meeting of States.

Furthermore, we can increase the effectiveness of international cooperation and assistance by supporting the development of tools, such as the web-based Implementation Support System for the implementation of the Programme of Action which the Office for Disarmament Affairs will present to you later today. As you will note, simple solutions sometimes can go a long way towards achieving lofty goals.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have high hopes for this Biennial Meeting of States. The preparatory process conducted by Ambassador Dalius Čekuolis, has been smooth and thorough. Civil society organizations are participating in high numbers and the regional organizations are well prepared following the preparatory synergy

conference they organized in Brussels last May. The task now is to transform this momentum into an outcome that will be embraced by the General Assembly to provide guidance for a stronger implementation of the Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons and the Tracing Instrument.

You can count on the Office for Disarmament Affairs and its partners within the UN system to remain committed to providing every assistance to Member States.