

UNITED NATIONS



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**Fourth 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**

Opening remarks

by

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Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we approach the tenth anniversary of the Programme of Action, we have gathered during this week to take stock of progress to date and to consider how to make the Programme of Action – and its related International Tracing Instrument – increasingly effective and relevant to meet future challenges. As this is the last biennial meeting before the Review Conference scheduled for 2012, this meeting will certainly be more forward-looking.

The global scourge from the illicit trade in small arms and ammunition continues to wreak havoc, albeit in different manifestations: youth gangs terrorising a neighbourhood; pirates capturing commercial vessels – including oil tankers; armed groups attacking civilians or peacekeepers; insurgents fighting government forces; drug lords randomly killing law enforcers or anyone else interfering with their unlawful business; and bandits hijacking humanitarian aid convoys. They all share a common characteristic – the ability to massively multiply their force through the use of illicitly acquired fire power. The illicit circulation of arms and ammunition is, therefore, highly destabilising, impacting security and development in literally all regions of the world: from Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Pacific, to the Americas.

Over the past decade, the Programme of Action has assumed a central role in the international community's actions against the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons.

Significant progress has been achieved in the implementation of the Programme of Action. A number of States have strengthened their relevant legislation to stem the proliferation of illicit small arms at the national level. Also, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes have been developed to assist affected countries. Some States have integrated small arms action plans into national development strategies.

But serious gaps remain regarding implementation of the Programme of Action at the national level. As the Secretary-General has noted earlier, national reports are often unclear on what the challenges are in national implementation, and how they could be overcome. Also, the setting up of procedures for effective operational information exchange with investigative and law enforcement authorities from other States and with INTERPOL leaves much to be desired.

The Programme of Action's suggested measures at the regional level have prompted some promising regional initiatives to curb the illicit trade in small arms, especially from a norm-setting point of view. More efforts are needed to reflect these initiatives in national legislation and procedures.

At the global level, the successful outcome of the Third Biennial Meeting of States in 2008 was most encouraging. This was evident from the substantive recommendations for tackling illicit brokering, improving stockpile management, implementing the Tracing Instrument, and strengthening assistance and cooperation. Also, at the third Biennial Meeting of States, governments agreed upon proposals to improve and enhance the implementation of the Programme of Action, including by suggesting that national reports could be utilized to communicate assistance needs; regional meetings could be convened to connect global with regional processes; and national reporting could be conducted in a more standardized manner.

As became clear from informal consultations, this biennial meeting will re-consider two familiar but essential themes: the International Tracing Instrument and assistance and cooperation. In addition, some fresh and topical subjects have been introduced in order to broaden implementation efforts. Nevertheless, the themes of illicit brokering and stockpile management remain current and central to the implementation of the Programme of Action at the national and regional levels.

As stated earlier, this biennial meeting presents an opportunity to consider future meetings, if States so wish. In just over six months, from 10-14 January 2011, a Meeting of Governmental Experts is scheduled “to address key implementation challenges and opportunities relating to particular issues and themes, including international cooperation and assistance”. That meeting would benefit from further focus during this week on what Member States would like to achieve with this expert meeting.

In this context, I would like to refer to the Secretary-General’s assessment of the Programme of Action, which could be helpful in identifying areas that need further consideration. The Secretary-General has indicated that the Programme of Action “lacks measurability and specific numerical targets. Whereas other landmark documents, such as the United Nations Millennium Declaration, are associated with concrete targets and deadlines, the Programme of Action proposes neither benchmarks nor cut-off dates. It does not provide concrete procedures for operational information exchange among States’ investigative or law enforcement authorities. The instrument does not provide a specific framework to facilitate international assistance and cooperation among States. Hence, States have had difficulty finding cooperative structures and linking needs with resources.”¹

We should heed the words of the Secretary-General and utilize this week’s meeting, as well as the Expert Meeting in January 2011, to discuss further the improvements required at the global level with respect to the Programme of Action. These could include: improving measurability, acknowledging the value of web-based information platforms and matching assistance needs with available resources.

¹ S/2008/258

The Programme of Action does not exist in a vacuum. In forums within the United Nations system and outside – such as the World Customs Organization – related processes are also underway. Within the UN, small arms issues are linked and interwoven with peacekeeping and peace-building efforts, the protection of civilians in armed conflict, the Firearms Protocol, children and armed conflict and the drive towards an arms trade treaty. Of particular note is the growing emphasis on the linkage between development and armed violence, which will be discussed for the first time this coming September at the High-level Plenary Meeting on the Millennium Development Goals.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to laud Ambassador Pablo Macedo for his dedicated efforts in preparing for the Fourth Biennial Meeting of States which I believe have been extensive, all-inclusive, transparent and thorough. In addition, the participation of civil society organizations and regional organizations will add broader perspective and contribute to the success of this week's meeting.

I hope that the Fourth Biennial Meeting of States shall produce an outcome which will enhance implementation of the Programme of Action and its Tracing Instrument. In this regard, please rest assured that the Office for Disarmament Affairs and its partners within the UN system will do their utmost to provide every assistance to Member States in their efforts.

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