

**Second Biennial Meeting of States
to Consider the Implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action to
Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light
Weapons in All Its Aspects**

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

Statement during thematic debate, 14 July 2005

Capacity-building

Mr. Chairman,

We would like to first thank you for the opportunity to present our views in this thematic debate.

The International Committee of the Red Cross would like to emphasize the need for further efforts in the area of capacity-building for military, security and police forces in the application of international humanitarian law and human rights. States have existing obligations to ensure that State officials use small arms and light weapons in ways consistent with these bodies of law.

Practical training and instruction for those who bear weapons to act in accordance with international norms is a crucial way of encouraging responsible conduct and reducing misuse of weapons. This must be combined with effective sanctions for those found responsible for violations of these rules.

Securing respect for humanitarian law by all parties to an armed conflict, including non-State armed groups, is a key concern for the ICRC as it is essential to improving the protection of civilians. The ICRC therefore provides practical support to States for the training of armed, security and police forces and also promotes respect for humanitarian law by non-State armed groups. In 2003, for example, more than 30 specialized delegates conducted or contributed to courses, seminars and military exercises involving some 21,600 police and military personnel in 141 countries.

The International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in 2003 also acknowledged the importance of this area of capacity-building as an integral element in reducing the human suffering resulting from the uncontrolled availability and misuse of small arms. The Agenda for Humanitarian Action adopted by the Conference, established that: "States, with the support of the ICRC and National Societies, should ensure that armed, police and security forces receive systematic training in international humanitarian law and human rights law, in particular concerning the responsible use of weapons. Where appropriate, similar training should be encouraged for organized armed groups." (Agenda for Humanitarian Action, Final Goal 2.3, Action 3)

Mr. Chair,

The ICRC believes that enhanced respect for existing norms and principles, such as those contained in international humanitarian law, can increase people's safety and security and reduce the risk of small arms misuse. Consequently, it can also contribute to reducing the demand for illicit weapons in areas where such demand is a response to insecurity.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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