

REPUBLIC OF
BOTSWANA

PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF
BOTSWANA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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STATEMENT BY

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AT THE

UNITED NATIONS 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

NEW YORK, 28 JUNE 2006

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Mr. President,

My delegation would like to join the rest of the distinguished delegations in congratulating you on your election as the President of this Conference. We look forward with confidence to well conducted proceedings and practical resolutions.

Mr. President,

Botswana welcomes this review conference with confidence, commitment and a hope that it will lead to improvement in the state of human security in Botswana, in the Southern African sub-region, the continent of Africa and throughout the world.

We believe that the Conference should not be aimed at re-opening negotiations on the UNPOA, but should focus attention on the progress made in the implementation of the UNPOA since 2001.

We have always demonstrated our commitment to small arms issues through our unwavering participation in several African initiatives on small arms and the United Nations Programme of Action (UNPOA) process itself.

Botswana was an active participant in the process of the negotiation of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on the control of Illicit Firearms, Ammunition and Related Materials. We also were an active participant in the African Union process that culminated in the Bamako Declaration.

Our commitment has carried us through the negotiation of the UNPOA, the Biennial Meeting of States and has brought us to this review conference.

Mr. President,

Botswana has signed and ratified, respectively, all the instruments mentioned above. We have also signed and ratified the United Nations Convention on Transnational Organised Crime and its Protocol Against the Illicit Trafficking in Firearms Ammunition and Related Components. It was easy for us to do so as we are a country that has long chosen a path of strict control over firearms in order to build a society free from guns and gun related crime.

In the 1980's, long before there were any loud thoughts about small arms and light weapons control, Botswana amended its gun control laws to enhance the severity of punishment for anyone convicted of possessing a military type weapon which we termed "an arm of war". Any person convicted of illegal possession of such weapon in Botswana is liable to imprisonment for a minimum of five (5) years.

Since the signing and ratification of the regional and international instruments referred to above, Botswana has been busy carrying out law enforcement activities and improving its regulatory infrastructure on firearms issues.

Botswana's National Focal Point (NFP) was established in 2002 and has been functional since then. It draws its membership from a wide array of other government departments, agencies and NGOs. The latter have come in very handy as a bridge enabling us to reach out to civil society.

With the contribution of the National Focal Point, we have been able to train and install 15 district task forces throughout the country. These task forces are a microcosm of the National Focal Point operating at district level and focusing on local problems.

We have also been able to hold a National Conference on Small Arms, produce a National Action Plan on Small Arms and a Draft National Policy on Small Arms.

We have had a destruction policy in place in Botswana since 2001. To date we have destroyed 4,773 firearms. We have nearly 2,000 firearms ready for destruction and our Government has agreed that we should carry out a public destruction of this batch of firearms for public education purposes.

It is worthy to note Mr. President that in Botswana, a maximum of 200 shotguns and 200 hunting rifles are allowed to enter the market on a yearly basis as per the quota set by the Arms Quota Board. Therefore, in essence, we have been destroying more firearms than we licensed to people in the past five years.

Many of our successes in implementing the PoA could not have been possible without the presence of the NFP and another partner which I would like to pay tribute to.

SAFER AFRICA has been a critical success factor in all our initiatives. They have provided us with generous funding and technical advice throughout the process.

At the moment we are working hand in hand on a proposed project to computerize the records of our Central Arms Registry and we are confident that the success that has characterized our partnership in the past will also be manifested in the current project.

We are also lagging behind as a country in the review of our legislation on firearms. This is a result of shortage of personnel to work on the project on a full time basis. However, we have constituted a multi-sectoral Committee which will work on the project, hopefully with the least of delay.

Mr. President,

In spite of all the good efforts that have been made in combating small arms in Botswana and in the Southern African Region, we still see a disconcerting prevalence of armed robberies in which firearms are used. In most cases, these firearms are brought by foreign nationals and they often have their serial numbers erased.

This situation calls for the improvement in the quality of mutual legal assistance States render each other in the investigation of these cases. The UNPOA clearly provides for mutual legal assistance, but our assessment is that there is still vast room for improvement.

We are however proud to declare that in the Southern African Sub-Region, under the auspices of the Southern African Regional Police Chiefs Cooperation Organization (SARPCCO), the police have made a distinguished contribution in the Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) initiatives. The SADC Protocol on the Control of Illicit Firearms and Related Materials is a product of the Legal Sub-Committee of SARPCCO.

Even before the Protocol became binding, the Police Chiefs agreed to carry out quarterly simultaneous operations at ports of entry which would mainly be focusing on intercepting illicit firearms. These operations are being carried out every three months and though the number of firearms seized is not that significant, the message to the criminal fraternity is loud and clear, that is, illegal firearms are not tolerated in Southern Africa.

In Southern Africa, we have suffered from a scarcity of donor funding for small arms initiatives. This has resulted in us lagging behind other sub-regions in implementing the PoA, despite their having used our programs and initiatives as a benchmark. We hope that following this Conference, our regional organization will actively seek offers of regional assistance, so that we too can make headway with implementing the PoA.

We submit that a lot of the offers of technical and financial assistance made in the past have not been fulfilled and therefore that a re-dedication to such commitments needs to be made.

Mr. President,

I would like to conclude by reiterating my delegations full support for the convening of this Conference. Peace and security, low levels of crime, especially gun related

crime, are a condition *sine qua non*, for the attainment of the millennium development goals. There is no way that our people can enjoy a better quality of life in a world that is riddled with violent crime fuelled by the easy availability of small arms and light weapons.

Our National Vision 2016 in Botswana aspires for a safe and secure nation by the year 2016. We envisage a nation free from violent crime and generally characterized by low levels of crime. A nation where citizens and visitors can lead their lives in peace, secure in their minds that they will not fall victim to indiscriminate violent crime.

This is a vision that we also have for Southern Africa, Africa as a whole and the entire globe.

We therefore ask you all to join us in working towards that vision of a safer Africa, and a safer world, for our own sake, and that of future generations.

I thank you for your attention.

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