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STATEMENT  
BY

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At the UN Review Conference of the Programme of Action to  
Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the illicit Trade in Small Arms and  
Light Weapons in all its Aspects

3 July 2006

*Please check against delivery*

Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Permit me to begin by conveying my delegation's warm congratulations to you, Mr. President, and to the members of the bureau on your well-deserved election to guide our work at this review conference. Your election reflects the collective confidence of Member States in your leadership, and Rwanda reiterates its complete support and readiness to work with you to ensure the best possible outcomes.

Rwanda fully associates itself with the statement of the African Group and the African Common Position at this review conference.

Mr. President,

Rwanda has been a prime victim of illicit trade and proliferation of small arms and light weapons, particularly during the 1994 Genocide and its aftermath. We know from firsthand experience that small arms and light weapons, which are responsible for as many as 300,000 deaths each year, have neither a small nor light impact on communities blighted by conflict. In fact these are the real weapons of mass destruction.

We, therefore, re-affirm our commitment to international and regional initiatives to prevent the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons.

Since the adoption of the Programme of Action in July 2001, Rwanda has taken significant steps in combating the illicit trade and proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The challenge now is to consolidate these developments both nationally and at the sub-regional level, because we recognise that given the close interrelationships between communities in the Great Lakes Region and East Africa, our responses at the national level are only as good as the weakest link within the sub-region.

Mr. President,

It is in recognition of this that Rwanda ratified the Nairobi Protocol for the prevention, control and reduction of small arms and light weapons in the Great Lakes Region and Horn of Africa and has been party to a number of initiatives taken at international, regional and local levels which have culminated in the commitments we are discussing today.

At the nationally level, Rwanda continues to strengthen the capacity of the National Focal Point as a means to enhance implementation of the programmes to address the problems associated with small arms and light weapons.

The National Focal Point conducts public awareness programmes aimed at highlighting among the population the problem of the illicit trade and proliferation of small arms. The NFP also works with Government departments and civil society in developing a National Programme of Action to address the problem of the prevention, eradicating, combat of the illicit trade and proliferation of small arms and light weapons in all its aspects.

Rwanda is now in the process of revising and harmonizing its arms legislation with neighbouring countries. Our collective goal is to enact stricter importation and ownership control measures.

Rwanda's national legislation is also being harmonized with the UN Programme of action. The cross-border proliferation of small arms and light weapons through non-state actors and other illegal networks present a considerable challenge to our sub-region. The solution therefore lies in States of our sub-region working together to harmonize national legislation and systematically plug the gaps and loopholes that allow illicit trade and trafficking of small arms and light weapons, among many other concerted efforts.

Mr. President,

Despite all the efforts of the Government of Rwanda and the initiatives taken by some of our neighbours, the Ex-FAR and Interahamwe militia, that are responsible for the 1994 Genocide in

Rwanda, continue to roam free in neighbouring countries in possession of large quantities of small arms and light weapons, and using these weapons to continue to perpetrate massive crimes against humanity.

These forces and other non-State actors in our sub-region are the main source of insecurity and the illicit trade and proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the Great Lakes Region. This problem requires the urgent attention of the International Community, in accordance with numerous Security Council resolutions and Presidential Statements, to ensure the full, complete and unconditional disarmament, demobilization and repatriation of these genocidal militias. Our sub-region will not know peace, security and development until these forces are neutralized. We therefore renew our appeal to the International Community to give this issue the urgent attention it deserves.

Mr. President,

Pursuant to the Programme of Action, Rwanda destroyed 6000 firearms in 2005 and a further 1500 firearms only last week on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2006. Some of these firearms had been used in the 1994 Genocide and others had been trafficked into Rwanda from the neighbouring countries. These firearms were recovered as a result of community policing, with the overwhelming support and participation from local populations, and through Police search operations.

It is clear that no State can single-handedly eradicate the scourge of illicit trade and proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The International Community should play a major role particularly by assisting National Institutions to establish the capacities to deal with the problem. We recognize and commend the generous assistance from our development partners in this respect, and we call upon them to strengthen and increase their commitments.

Mr. President,

The existing regulations and controls in some States are evidently inadequate to prevent illicit arms trafficking or excessive and

destabilizing accumulations and flows of small arms and light weapons. Weaknesses in some national laws, regulations, licensing procedures and enforcement mechanisms are exacerbated by a lack of political will, inconsistent approaches and inadequate coordination and cooperation at the national, bilateral, regional and global levels.

There is wide variation in national systems for regulating the manufacture of small arms and light weapons, their parts and components, ammunition and explosives, although in most States, such activities are well regulated. However, gaps remain where there are insufficient controls and licensing or authorization procedures for the manufacture, import, export and transfer and stockpile management for these weapons.

Legal definitions also vary, as do systems for regulation and oversight and minimum standards relating to record-keeping and conditions of manufacture. Similarly, since prescribed standards and techniques for marking weapons during the process of manufacture also vary substantially, in some cases marking and record-keeping systems are too inadequate to enable weapons tracing.

When they exist, regional efforts, by their very nature, do not address the global nature of the sources of small arms and light weapons and the increasingly transnational networks of brokers, dealers, financiers and transporters.

Mr. President,

Finally, we join other delegations in expressing our support for greater control on the sale of these weapons to non-State actors. We believe that this would go a long way in implementing the Programme of Action and would have a positive practical effect on peace, security and development around the world.

There are grounds for optimism. States are committed to the Programme of Action. Donor countries are providing assistance to fund activities within the framework of the POA. We commend them for that and encourage them to continue such assistance. But we

must intensify our efforts and continue to close the gaps and loopholes where they exist.

I thank you.