

**Statement by H.E. Dr. Sylvester Ekundayo Rowe
Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for 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**

9 January 2006

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me thank you all for the honour you have just bestowed on me by your unanimous decision to elect me as Chairman of this Preparatory Committee. I should also express my sincere appreciation to the Non-aligned Movement and the African Group for their confidence in my ability to undertake this onerous but noble task. I must say however that one of the best credentials I have for this assignment is that I come a country that has experienced and is still experiencing the agony and the devastating consequences of the illicit trade, circulation and use of what are euphemistically described as small arms and light weapons.

The work of this Committee is not mine alone. It is ours. It is a collective responsibility. I am just, as the saying goes, *primus inter pares*. Therefore let us reassure ourselves that given the gravity of the problem, given the magnitude of human casualty and suffering among children, and given the continued threat they pose to peace, security and stability, we shall and we will work together, conscientiously, to bring this two-week session to a successful conclusion. As the Secretary-General has rightly observed, we must strive just as hard to eliminate the threat of illicit small arms and light weapons as we do to eliminate the threat of weapons of mass destruction. Gradually, there is an emerging recognition that small arms and light weapons are in fact weapons of mass destruction.

According to our mandate from the General Assembly and our agenda, the purpose of this preparatory meeting and the Conference in June/July, is, and I quote: “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.” Unquote. However, I would like us to bear in mind that the real purpose of the process that we are embarking on today is not merely to “review progress made”, but more importantly, to prepare the groundwork for a thorough examination, indeed an assessment of what we have done, and have not done in the implementation of the Programme of Action. At the same time, and on the basis of that examination, we must design a forward-looking strategy for further action. At the end of the second biennial

meeting of States last year, while welcoming the progress made, didn't we acknowledge that further action was required to fulfill the commitments undertaken in the Programme of Action?

In this regard, we should resist the temptation of re-emphasizing what is, or what is not in the Programme of Action; what was covered or not covered in that document. We should also resist the urge of reiterating what we are not here to do. For instance, we should try and avoid dwelling on the obvious that we are not here to reopen or renegotiate the Programme of Action. Distinguished delegates, friends, we've passed that stage, haven't we? Such an approach in the review process would serve no purpose. We should instead concentrate and focus attention on what else or what more we should do to combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects.

The work of this Committee and the review process is about people. It is not progress *per se*. It is, in the word of the Preamble to that document about reducing and even eliminating the human suffering caused by the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, and to enhance the respect for life and the dignity of the human person. It is about the victims and potential victims of the unbridled use of these weapons throughout the world. And speaking of potential victims, we are all potential victims. Yes, the Programme of Action we adopted almost five years ago is a great document. There is no doubt about that. It is something that for obvious political reasons we don't want to meddle with, notwithstanding the fact that it is not legally binding, and that reports on what we (States) have done to implement the Programme of Action are submitted on a voluntary basis.

However, while acknowledging progress made, we must also realize that a lot has happened in the area of human safety security since we adopted the Programme of Action. While we are patting ourselves on the back for the significant progress made in the implementation of the Programme of Action, we must also remember the number of people who have been gunned down by illicit small arms and light weapons since we adopted the Programme of Action, not only in areas of armed conflict such as Africa, but also in criminal encounters, some organized, others at random.

Distinguished delegates, we only have to look around in this bastion of peace and peace-making, the United Nations Headquarters, including the foyer of this conference building, to recognize the imperative of responding to threats against human safety and security; in this case the safety and security of us all. I mention this not to berate the Programme of Action and the progress we have made in its implementation. On the contrary, it is intended to prod us to place the life and welfare of people at the centre of our deliberations on the illicit trade and illicit use of small arms and light weapons.

This is why, and taking into account the preamble of the Programme of Action, I have chosen human/humanitarian and other dimensions as the theme of the first cluster of the thematic interactive debate. As you know, there are five other clusters or themes, each with a list of suggested issues on which relevant questions will be raised for in-depth consideration. Each debate will be led by two Moderators chosen from among the

members of the bureau. Further details of the debates will be communicated to you latter; probably by Wednesday January 11. As I had indicated during informal consultations, this format should facilitate a thorough examination of a wide range of issues from the national, regional and global perspectives. It should also help to throw some light on the nature and outline of the draft final document that the Preparatory Committee may wish to recommend to the Review Conference.

Distinguished delegates, unlike the Preparatory Committee for the 2001 Conference that had to virtually start from scratch, we have a Programme of Action. This is why I do not foresee another session of this Preparatory Committee. With determination, with a focus on building on the strong foundation that we laid five years ago; with the acknowledgement that further action is required to fulfill the commitments undertaken in the Programme of Action; with the full realization of the increasing human suffering attributed to the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons; with the recognition of the urgency of eradicating, preventing and combating the scourge; and moreover, with the full realization that we are all potential victims of this scourge, I have no doubt that we would complete our assignment within the space of these two weeks. In other words, there should be no need for another session of the Preparatory Committee. It is possible. We can and should make it possible.

I thank you for your attention.
