



WFSA

The World Forum
on the Future of
Sport Shooting Activities

Preparatory Committee for the United Nations conference to review progress made in implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Control and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects

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“Looking Back at UN Small Arms Effort”

Statement by Thomas Mason
WFSA Executive Secretary

I am Thomas Mason, the American Executive Secretary of the World Forum on the Future of Sport Shooting Activities, an ECOSOC NGO which speaks for most of the major hunting, sport shooting organizations and firearms owners in the world. We first wish to thank you, Mr. Chair, and the body itself, for the privilege of addressing this very important meeting.

Mr. Chairman, it will have been five years since the adoption of the Programme of Action by the time the review conference meets in June. However, Mr. Chair, it will have been over ten years since the United Nations became actively engaged in the small arms issue. Let us briefly recapitulate that history. In January of 1995, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali mentioned small arms in his “Supplement to an Agenda for Peace.” (S/1995/1, 1995, Section D. paragraphs 60-65). Eventually, on December 12, 1995 the UN General Assembly passed the first of many resolutions on small arms, A/RES/50/70 B. That resolution established a Panel of Government experts which began the work which led to the 2001 Conference which led to the POA which in turn has led us to being here today. This is to say nothing of the parallel process which produced the UN Firearms Protocol.

Mr. Chair, I have been present throughout almost all of this ten-year effort. Perspective is an interesting thing, Mr. Chair; it shows us where we have been, but sometimes shows us the inevitability of where we are going. The Programme of Action and indeed all other UN efforts in the field of small arms have not been without controversy. According to some, the “task” remains uncompleted. Mr. Chair, it serves little purpose to blame one country or one group if expectations have not been met.

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Mr. Chair, I believe there needs to be an appraisal of the past efforts and a focusing of any future efforts. Mr. Chair, there is a fact, which, try as we might, can't be ignored.

Mr. Chair, for ten years the United Nations has engaged in an effort regarding illicit small arms, but it has never properly and effectively taken into account the undeniable fact that a majority of the 630 million small arms in the world are legally owned by civilians. Mr. Chair, I must say that instead of accommodating or working with this fact, some have treated those legitimately owned civilian firearms as part of the problem. They are not part of the problem and their status should be considered purely a domestic political matter.

Mr. Chair, let me finish on a positive note. We are going to be discussing some very important issues which merit our concerted attention and discussion; brokering and the UK's Transfer Control Initiative fit into this category. Firearms safety and customs procedures are two practical, specific areas that also merit consideration. We stand ready to offer our expertise and assistance. Thank you.