



Press Release

Major review at United Nations to assess progress made and actions needed to further stem illegal small arms trade

(UNITED NATIONS, 6 June) – Five years after the adoption of the UN Programme of Action to address the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, some 2,000 representatives from governments, international and regional organizations and civil society will meet at UN Headquarters from 26 June to 7 July 2006 to review progress made, to address future cooperation and activities, and to assess challenges on the road ahead.

By unanimously adopting the Programme of Action in 2001, the UN Member States committed themselves to collecting and destroying illegal weapons, adopting and/or improving national legislation to help criminalize the illicit trade in small arms, regulating the activities of brokers, setting strict import and export controls, taking action against violators of such laws, and better coordinating international efforts to that end.

The small arms Review Conference should reinforce the momentum for action among Member States, civil society, international and regional organizations. The Conference is also expected to welcome the establishment of a group of governmental experts who will meet in November 2006 to tackle the issue of reining in illegal arms brokers.

“The conference offers an opportunity for all countries to review their pledges to get rid of illegal trade in small arms and, for this purpose, to develop a strategy for further implementation of the UN Programme of Action, agreed in 2001”, stated the President-designate of the Small Arms Review Conference, Ambassador Prasad Kariyawasam, Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations in New York.

Since its adoption, the Programme of Action has stimulated a wide range of initiatives at the national, regional and global levels, such as:

More than 50 countries have strengthened their national legislation to control the illegal trade in small arms, including Argentina, Brazil, Cambodia, Germany, Mauritius, Nicaragua, South Africa and the United Kingdom. Similar reforms are under way in many other countries.

In Africa, where illegal small arms have been used to kill directly or indirectly hundreds of thousands of people in conflict zones, three legally-binding agreements have been developed to address this issue and to focus on the humanitarian impact: the “Nairobi Protocol” on firearms, covering East Africa and the Great Lakes Region; a SADC Protocol covering Southern Africa; and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Convention on Importation and Manufacture of Light Weapons.

More than 60 countries have collected and destroyed large amounts of illegal small arms. Different methods have been used, including by “Flames of Peace” bonfires (Burundi, Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Haiti, Rwanda, Senegal, South

Africa); by crushing them with steamrollers, bulldozers or tanks (Brazil, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Paraguay, Sri Lanka); by dismantling weapons (Argentina, Costa Rica, Timor-Leste, Uganda); by discarding in deep water (Senegal and others). Other cost-effective and environment-friendly methods have also been used.

UN peacekeeping operations have developed and implemented disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes in post-conflict situations, especially in Africa, helping thousands of former combatants (including women and children) disarm and return to civilian life in countries such as Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone. UN Country Teams have also carried out DDR programmes in Cambodia, Central African Republic and Guinea Bissau.

The UN General Assembly adopted in December 2005 the International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons. This new instrument will help law enforcement officials identify sources of illegal weapons. In a recent report, Secretary-General Kofi Annan called this the most significant UN achievement in 2005 in fighting the illicit trade in small arms.

The UN Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition came into force in July 2005 as the first legally binding global instrument on small arms which aims at strengthening cooperation among States to combat illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms. The Firearms Protocol supplements the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and is expected to become a useful tool for law enforcement in the countries that ratified it.

Since 2001, the UN Programme of Action has brought about some significant developments in combating the illicit trade in small arms, concludes the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research in a study on national implementation. "However, much still remains to be done," it states, "to prevent illicit small arms from causing more devastating tragedies."

The Small Arms Survey, a Geneva-based independent research project, estimated that the number of deaths caused by small arms used in conflicts worldwide to have been between 80,000 and 108,000 (in 2003). The Survey reports that at least 200,000 non-conflict-related small arms deaths occur each year, many of them by illegal small arms.

The UN Programme of Action covers the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, which fuels armed conflicts and supports the activities of groups involved in organized crime, trafficking in drugs and the illegal exploitation and trade of precious minerals.

The Review Conference will not be negotiating any treaty to prohibit citizens of any country from possessing firearms or to interfere with the legal trade in small arms and light weapons.

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Conference website: <http://www.un.org/smallarms2006/>

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