Preparatory Committee for the Third 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

By

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Mr. Chair, Ambassador Brunet
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The dire consequences of the misuse and illicit circulation of small arms have been documented well by the United Nations. The excessive accumulation and widespread availability of these weapons increase the lethality and duration of conflict.

The use of small arms remains responsible for a significant portion of direct conflict deaths. But in post-conflict situations, the rate of firearms-related homicides is frequently higher than that of battlefield deaths. These weapons are also the dominant tools in organized crime and domestic violence.

Armed conflict is the main cause of people fleeing their homes, and has become the most common cause of food insecurity. This has been tragically illustrated by the crises in Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen. On average, United Nations peacekeepers or staff are killed on a weekly basis by bullets from illicit weaponry. Gun violence erodes legal and peaceful dispute resolution mechanisms and undermines the rule of law.

In many places, the excessive amounts of guns in circulation aggravate poverty, inhibit access to social services, and divert energy and resources away from efforts to improve human development.

Of growing concern are the increasing links between transnational organized crime, illicit small arms trafficking and terrorism, as well as the use of emerging technologies and the internet, including the “dark web”, for illicit trafficking and production.

The Secretary-General has called for strengthening arms regulations and control measures as a necessary means to address some of today’s top priorities: conflict prevention, upholding humanitarian principles, promoting sustainable development, and dealing with future threats.
Simply put: the full and effective implementation of the Programme of Action and its International Tracing Instrument are central to saving lives.

Since their adoption, significant progress to control the illicit trade in small arms has been made, and I applaud States for those efforts. These include the progress within this process on key areas such as technological developments in small arms manufacture and the contribution of the Programme of Action to the attainment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

But gaps remain and a lot of work still must be done.

To help States strengthen their implementation efforts, United Nations agencies developed the International Small Arms Control Standards, or “ISACS”, and the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines, or “IATG”. These provide useful guidance on all aspects of the life-cycle management of weapons and ammunition.

Before you begin your thematic debate today, let me use this opportunity to reflect on three central points, which I believe are key to the small arms control agenda overall, and to the upcoming Third Review Conference in particular.

First, the landmark 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development crucially recognizes that only peaceful societies will achieve their desired level of sustainable development. As such, adequate small arms regulation and control is an important means of reducing armed conflict and violence, and thereby promoting peaceful and inclusive societies.

This recognition of the interconnected nature of arms regulation, peace & security, and development, has given States and the United Nations system a significant opportunity to increase the coherence and effectiveness of our combined efforts to combat problemscaused by small arms.

Progress on the implementation of the Programme of Action and the International Tracing Instrument will thus naturally feed into progress on the 2030 Agenda. And your national reports under these instruments can serve as a benchmark for measuring such progress.
Second, and also connected to the 2030 Agenda, is the need to integrate a gender perspective in small arms control. The possession, use, misuse and impacts of small arms and light weapons, as well as general attitudes towards them, have clear gender dimensions. When these dimensions are not sufficiently understood or adequately dealt, the success of our policies and regulations will be limited.

It is therefore imperative that we connect existing frameworks and standards such as the 2030 Agenda and the Women, Peace and Security agenda with small arms control. In this regard, ensuring the full, equal and meaningful participation and empowerment of women is indispensable. But we should not lose sight of that fact that boys and young men represent the majority of those who are perpetrators as well as victims. In order to effectively mainstream gender perspective into this work, we need more research and analysis, more advocacy, education, training, and ultimately better, disaggregated data.

And third, arms control efforts must take account of the fast pace of change resulting from developments in science and technology. The challenges and opportunities were usefully discussed in 2015 at the second meeting of governmental experts. This revealed an increased use of new materials and technologies in the manufacturing, marking, stockpiling and tracing of weapons, their components and ammunition – from modularity through 3-D printing and chip technology to micro-stamping.

While technologies can be beneficial or problematic, one thing is clear: States now should take the next step and consider their operational and policy implications. Indeed, the Secretary-General has underlined in his report on the topic that States may wish to consider developing a supplement to the ITI, such as a technical annex, which would reflect the implications of present-day technology in particular on the marking, record-keeping and tracing of small arms and light weapons.

I trust that States will see the urgency of making further progress on this topic, in a concerted way. The Third United Nations Review Conference will be a great opportunity to seek common ground and concrete solutions on
preventing, combating and eradicating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects.

I wish you all fruitful discussions and a successful meeting.