Remarks by Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs at the Open Arria Formula Meeting of the United Nations Security Council

Building Peace through Effective Small Arms Control

The Western Balkans Roadmap for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons as a Model for Effective Regional Arms Control

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ECOSOC Chamber
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by congratulating France and Germany for initiating a “joint presidency” and for their continued leadership on the issue of small arms by bringing forward this Open Arria Formula Meeting.

According to the 2018 Global Peace Index, peace levels continue to deteriorate across the world for the fourth consecutive year. Ongoing conflicts remain unresolved. Acts of terrorism are increasing. And internal conflicts continue to be on the rise.

In all of those scenarios, the illicit trafficking and misuse of small arms is a leading factor. Small arms are cheap, portable, concealable, and abundant – making them the weapon of choice for those wishing to wreak havoc.

Indeed, the consequences of the excessive accumulation, illicit trade in and misuse of small arms and their ammunition are far-reaching. Their widespread availability is a key enabler of armed violence and conflict, destabilizing regions, prolonging conflicts, and derailing peace processes. Each year, small arms take over 250,000 lives. They are used to undermine law enforcement, to derail elections, to sustain transnational crime, to fuel terrorism, to commit gender-based violence; all while hampering the delivery of humanitarian assistance, complicating peacemaking efforts, and contributing massively to the unprecedented sixty-eight million people around the world having been forced to leave their homes.

The social and economic consequences are profound. Lack of access to basic health care and infrastructure. A decline in school attendance and graduation rates. And enduring psycho-social trauma that affects entire generations. Unemployment caused by a lack of foreign investment. In 2017 alone, it is estimated that the global economy lost over twelve per cent of global GDP due to conflicts and crises. It left every single person in the world some 2,000 dollars worse off that year.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Successfully tackling the uncontrolled availability of small arms must be part of a comprehensive approach, firmly rooted in development considerations because we now know that peace and sustainable development are mutually reinforcing concepts. The 2030 Agenda, which includes the target to significantly reduce arms trafficking, guides our way.
We must work on achieving the SDGs in an integrated and holistic manner that takes into account small arms control prerogatives particularly in societies where pervasive insecurity hampers social and economic progress. Ending poverty must go hand in hand with strategies that build economic growth and address a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and environmental protection, and security and safety of people and communities.

So, how should we achieve this? Allow me to suggest a few ideas and inform you how we intend to contribute from disarmament perspectives.

First, to be effective in tackling the scourge of conflict and armed violence and its impacts, we must be proactive in our actions, breaking down silos, working in partnerships, and leveraging expertise. The Secretary-General’s disarmament agenda, ‘Securing Our Common Future’, has reiterated disarmament’s place at the heart of the United Nations’ commitment to collective, national and human security. We will put human beings at the center of arms regulation activities.

To do so, it is important that the international community fully leverages the relevant existing legal and normative frameworks. The Programme of Action on small arms, the Firearms Protocol under the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and the Arms Trade Treaty are crucial global instruments for achieving the overarching goal of preventing conflict and building and sustaining peace.

Second, it is indeed the national and local levels where the real, measurable, and cross-sectoral action needs to be undertaken. The Secretary-General stresses in his Disarmament Agenda the need to further improve country-level approaches to the small-arms issue. Needless to say, the ownership and leadership of national governments will be a critical piece of such country-level actions.

The United Nations has developed – with dozens of partners – the most authoritative standards and guidelines for practical small-arms control, called ‘MOSAIC’: the Modular Small-Arms-Control Implementation Compendium. We’ve done the same for solid, safe and secure ammunition management: the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines. If countries develop their standard operating procedures on the basis of these widely vetted guidelines, already in use in over 100 countries, they can be assured that their approach is of the highest quality.
And to better support country-level actions, the Secretary-General is establishing a dedicated facility to ensure sustained financing for coordinated, integrated small-arms control measures in most-affected countries. This facility – which we call the Saving Lives Entity, or “SALIENT” – is founded on the assumption that effective programmes must be sustained and multi-dimensional. More to the point, they must be integrated within wider peace-building and development plans. As I noted earlier, the problem of illicit small arms affects nearly every aspect of society: from public health to gender, from security to development, from border controls to inner-city youth, from human rights to maritime safety. A meaningful response must be equally multi-faceted. I am pleased to note that Japan and New Zealand have already provided some critical initial financial and political support for this endeavour. Other countries have announced they see the urgency of this kind of work, and expressed interest in contributing as well. Together with the Peacebuilding Support Office, UNDP and DPPA/DPO, we are starting to prepare concrete country-level actions to demonstrate practical examples of this approach. It is my hope that the SALIENT fund, through additional year-on-year contributions from Member States, will provide a long-term, sustainable vehicle for this kind of response.

Third, the Secretary-General calls for strengthened partnerships for regional cooperation in arms control which will directly contribute to regional stability. My office promotes and supports regional action through our three regional centres. Those centres – which cover Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific, and Africa – assist States to strengthen their capacities in order to reach their security and disarmament objectives.

National action can benefit tremendously from adequate regional cooperation and agenda-setting. We applaud the regional approach on small arms control taken in the Western Balkans region. Its emphasis on measurable goals, concrete cut-off dates, and solid funding commitments is exemplary. Such elements are of particular value for application in other regions. My Office is keenly interested in duplicating successful approaches elsewhere, including through our regional centres, and it is my hope that the SALIENT fund will also eventually develop into a useful vehicle to promote regional-level programming by partner entities.

I would also remind States in all regions of their commitment to align regional processes on small arms with the global cycle of meetings under the Programme of Action. This allows a further synergetic interplay of global norm-setting feeding consistently into regional action,
and vice versa. Some regions have now started to do this, with immediate results in energizing regional undertakings on small-arms control.

In this context, let me mention one impressive regional policy on small arms that is gaining traction and which the UN system is committed to support: the African Union’s initiative on ‘Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020’. The current momentum this initiative has gathered is impressive, including through the recent adoption of Security Council resolution 2457 [Silencing the Guns in Africa]. Building on that dynamic, the United Nations is now coordinating its own entities to contribute substantially to the initiative; my office stands ready to provide technical expertise, guidance and assistance on implementing the aspirations set out in the silencing the guns initiative, in support of the African Union and its member states, together with various entities of the United Nations.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

To date, the implementation of small-arms control around the world remains uneven, and resources sparse. It is my hope that today’s meeting will constructively generate concrete ideas on how we can further strengthen implementation efforts. We need to “connect the dots” and integrate our efforts between normative and policy frameworks, concrete programmatic actions on the ground, and form strong partnerships between governments, regional organizations and various UN entities. We must keep pace with the magnitude of the challenges, and I believe we can.

Thank you.