



INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION
OFFICE OF THE PERMANENT OBSERVER TO THE UNITED NATIONS

STATEMENT

**by The Honorable François-Xavier de Donnea, M.P, Belgium
IPU co-Rapporteur on Small Arms and Light Weapons**

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE TO REVIEW PROGRESS MADE IN
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION (POA) TO
PREVENT, COMBAT AND ERADICATE THE ILLICIT TRADE IN SMALL
ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS IN ALL ITS ASPECTS

New York, 29 June 2006

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and their ammunition, are the source of considerable human suffering, particularly among the most vulnerable groups in society: women, children and the elderly. As such, SALW truly constitute “weapons of mass destruction”.

Each year, an average of 500,000 persons fall victim to SALW - nearly 60 per cent to bullets fired in, and further inflaming, armed conflict.

Reacting to this terrible toll, the 114th Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, meeting in Nairobi from 7 to 12 May 2006 with the participation of 118 national parliaments and 5 regional parliamentary organizations, adopted a firm and explicit resolution on the role of parliaments in strengthening control of trafficking in SALW and their ammunition.

The IPU Assembly is deeply concerned by the high political, social and financial costs incurred when SALW fuel armed conflict, armed criminal activity and terrorism, exacerbate violence, contribute to the displacement of civilians, undermine respect for international humanitarian law, impede the provision of humanitarian assistance to victims of armed conflict, and hinder a return to peace and sustainable development.

The IPU welcomes the adoption in 2001 of the United Nations Programme of Action and subsequent initiatives in this area.

The IPU underscores that the active involvement of the relevant national authorities and of parliaments is essential for the effectiveness of any measures to combat SALW proliferation, and urges all parliaments to spare no effort in this matter.

More specifically, the IPU Assembly calls upon parliaments to encourage their governments to reaffirm their commitment to implement the SALW Programme of Action and to build on their current commitment to combat SALW proliferation and misuse at this Review Conference, while focusing on areas where obstacles to full implementation of the SALW Programme of Action persist, namely: brokering, transfer controls, marking and tracing, end-user certification, stockpile management and destruction, ammunition and capacity-building.

The IPU encourages parliaments to promote the development of an international arms trade treaty to strictly regulate arms transfers on the basis of State obligations under international law and internationally accepted norms and human rights standards.

The IPU calls upon parliaments to ensure that those who provide SALW to children, or who recruit and use children in conflicts or armed operations, are subject to strong legal sanctions.

The IPU urges parliaments to adopt and enforce national legislation incorporating the United Nations Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials and the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.

The IPU calls upon parliaments to ensure that the provisions of the recently adopted International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons are fully implemented under national legislation, and that ammunition for SALW is covered by such legislation.

The IPU urges parliaments to make violations of arms embargoes a criminal offence under national law and to sanction logistical or financial support for such violations.

The IPU recommends that parliaments in countries engaged in disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation (DDRR) programmes encourage their governments to prioritize "weapons in exchange for development" schemes to provide community-based incentives for the voluntary surrender of illicitly held firearms. The IPU also stresses the need to incorporate a gender perspective in DDRR and peace-building strategies and activities.

The IPU encourages governments to destroy, in public view and wherever possible, all illicit SALW that are recovered by authorities, and to do so in a safe, environmentally responsible and cost-effective manner.

The IPU exhorts governments of countries that produce SALW to develop effective mechanisms for regulating their sale and distribution, both nationally and internationally, thus preventing their proliferation.

The IPU recommends that parliaments work together with civil society, including NGOs, to prevent the outbreak of conflict and to resolve social and economic problems underpinning armed conflict, including efforts to fight poverty, social exclusion, trafficking in human beings, trafficking in drugs, organized crime, terrorism and racism.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 114th IPU Assembly has adopted a clear, firm and purposeful resolution on the fight against trafficking in SALW and their ammunition, and the participating members of parliament have voiced their commitment in bringing their specific contribution to this process.

The representatives of parliaments who met in Nairobi from 7 to 12 May are firmly convinced that combating illicit trafficking in and improper use of SALW is a fundamental and essential condition for world peace, the fight against armed banditry and the trafficking that feeds it, the protection of vulnerable groups, and economic and social development.

Last but not least, we are convinced that disarmament and the reduction of armed violence are also essential to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The current proliferation and misuse of SALW are severely hampering achievement of these goals in various regions of the world, and particularly in several of the African countries: this is a question that we will all need to address more forcefully.

I thank you for your attention.