

Preparatory Committee for the 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

Contribution to Cluster III

Ambassador Dorothea Auer

Austria

on behalf of the European Union

New York, 16 January 2006

(check against delivery)

Cluster III: Excessive accumulation, misuse and uncontrolled spread

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to take the floor on behalf of the European Union. The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, the EFTA countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this statement.

Weapons Collection and Stockpile Management

Stockpile security and management is a major issue within the UN Programme of Action (PoA) and all countries need to take responsibility for this problem. It is also an area where international cooperation and assistance are important elements for further improvements (para III. 6 PoA).

The EU fully supports the PoA's call contained in para. II.21 "to develop and implement, where possible, effective disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, including the effective collection, control, storage and destruction of SALW, particularly in post-conflict situations". We also attach great importance to para II.35 according to which States undertake "to encourage the United Nations Security Council to consider, on a case-by-case basis, the inclusion, where applicable, of relevant provisions for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration in the mandates and budgets of peacekeeping operations". The EU welcomes that these elements have been included in GA 60/68.

The European Union has funded a broad range of weapons management projects around the world and remains committed to assisting capacity and knowledge building where it is most needed. In addition, the EU has contributed time and expertise and has demonstrated transparency in the field of physical stockpile and security management. For example, EU States have provided expert advice and training, given presentations, visited sites, written recommendation reports and have invited States to see internal stockpile and security arrangements. EU Member States also contributed to new OSCE agreements on ammunition stockpile management. The EU supports the destruction of surplus stocks of arms and the improvement of stockpile management practices, as these issues play a crucial role in the work towards preventing illicit transfers of small arms and light weapons.

The EU recognises the need for a systematic exchange of information among donor and recipient countries on small arms and light weapons assistance, including lessons learned and options for future cooperation.

Enhancing weapons management is an important means to block one of the most damaging channels for acquiring illicit weapons and ammunition. Weapons management encompasses a wide range of issues including stockpile management, marking and record-keeping of weapons and ammunition, identification of surplus weapons, disposal of weapons and the fight against corruption.

Ammunition

The fight against the illicit trade in ammunition is a pressing task. Hundreds of millions of small arms and light weapons are in circulation, a great part of them in zones of instability. For military combat, ammunition is needed in large quantities. The intensity of conflicts can be diminished significantly by interrupting the influx of ammunition and by drying up the stream of its illegal delivery.

Surplus ammunition can be diverted from military stockpiles into zones of instability where it fuels conflicts. It can also get into the hands of criminal gangs or terrorists. Ill-managed ammunition stockpiles threaten the population as they can damage the environment and pose the risk of explosion.

The Group of Experts which was appointed pursuant to the resolution „Small Arms“ of December 1997 (52/38 J) submitted a report in June 1999 (A/54/155) on the problems of ammunition and explosives in all their aspects. The aim of the report was to assess whether and how enhanced controls of ammunition and explosives can contribute to preventing and reducing the excessive and destabilizing accumulation and proliferation, as well as the abuse, of small arms and light weapons. In the view of the European Union the report constitutes an excellent basis for further work to promote the control of ammunition in the framework of the United Nations.

The report submitted by the chairman of the OEWG on marking and tracing on SALW 2005 which was endorsed by consensus contains a recommendation to address the issue of SALW ammunition in a comprehensive manner as part of a separate process conducted within the framework of the UN. In 2005 the UN General Assembly for the first time adopted a resolution (GA-Res. 60/74) exclusively dedicated to the problems of surplus conventional ammunition stockpiles and the illicit trafficking of ammunition.

At a regional and sub regional level much work has been dedicated to the issue of illicit ammunition. The EU has included ammunition in her Code of Conduct on Arms Exports and her Common Position on brokering as well as in her 2002 Joint Action to combat the destabilising accumulation and spread of small arms and light weapons. Furthermore, the recently adopted European Union's Strategy to combat illicit accumulation and trafficking of SALW explicitly extends to ammunition. The OSCE, including all the EU Member States, adopted a Document on Stockpiles of Conventional Ammunition in 2003.

The most urgent necessity is to ensure the security and safety of stockpiles of ammunition. Stockpile security aims at preventing losses of ammunition, stockpile safety aims at protecting ammunition and the stockpiles themselves against physical dangers.

The EU would welcome discussions among Participating States on how to tackle the issue of stockpiles of ammunition.

The EU also hopes that discussions at this meeting will reflect ways and means to enhance international cooperation in preventing, combating and eradicating illicit trade in small arms and light weapons ammunition.