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STATEMENT BY

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HEAD OF THE CANADIAN DELEGATION

TO THE OPENING OF THE PREPARATORY COMMITTEE FOR THE  
UN 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

NEW YORK, 09 JANUARY 2006

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DÉCLARATION DE

EARL TURCOTTE  
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LORS DE LA PREMIÈRE RÉUNION DU COMITÉ PRÉPARATOIRE  
DE LA CONFÉRENCE DES NATIONS UNIES CHARGÉE D'EXAMINER  
LES PROGÈS ACCOMPLIS DANS LA MISE EN OEUVRE DU  
PROGRAMME D'ACTION DES NATIONS UNIES VISANT À PRÉVENIR,  
COMBATTRE ET ÉLIMINER LE COMMERCE ILLICITES DES  
ARMES LÉGÈRES SOUS TOUS SES ASPECTS

NEW YORK, LE 09 JANVIER 2006

Let me begin by extending, on behalf of the whole Canadian delegation, our warmest congratulations on your election as chair of this very important event.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am always struck by the innocuous sound of the words "small arms and light weapons", for we know all too well that their collective impact on people throughout the world is anything but small and light.

Currently there are in excess of 600 million of these weapons in circulation, and millions more are added to the global arsenal each year. Most are used responsibly and for legitimate purposes such as defence, law enforcement, hunting, and the like. Many others, however, are used illegitimately, with the most awful and tragic consequences.

Last year, small arms alone were instrumental in the deaths more than half a million people - 10,000 per week. The vast majority were civilians, and at least a third were struck down in countries at peace. Many, possibly millions more people, fell victim to the indirect, but no less lethal, effect of these weapons as an obstacle to sustainable development.

The proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons exacerbate violence in countries in conflict, hamper post-conflict stabilization and peace-building efforts, restrict the delivery of humanitarian assistance and longer term international development, and contribute to violent crime.

No country, no region and no community is immune. And the situation is not getting better. Nor will it, in our view, unless and until we, the international community, take the concerted and dedicated action necessary to implement fully the UN Programme of Action on SALW negotiated in 2001.

Since that time, we have met formally on two occasions: the Biennial Meetings of States in 2003 and again in 2005. In 2003, it was clear that while relatively little had been done to implement the UN Programme of Action, states were committed to moving forward. By the time we met last summer, somewhat more had been accomplished, but far less than we all had hoped and expected might have been achieved four years hence.

This year, we will hold our first five year Review Conference. This is our first opportunity formally to take stock of what has been achieved, and what has not; to share lessons learned and make course corrections. It is a seminal opportunity to set a clear timetable for continuing the UN process in order to increase momentum and produce substantial, concrete results over the next five year period.

As is appropriate, we will consider matters of process and of substance. With respect to the former, in Canada's view, the practice of meeting on a biennial basis except during a review year is simply inadequate, as it clearly does not afford the small arms and light weapons issue the time and attention that it warrants. For this reason, we will circulate a

short working paper for consideration at the Review Conference that proposes, among other things, adoption of an informal inter-sessional programme of work that would have us come together semi-annually to develop ideas and recommendations for consideration during formal meetings of States and Review Conference(s). We could focus discussions on specific clusters of thematic sub-issues – perhaps along the lines of the cluster topics outlined in the Chair's paper of 20 December 2005.

In addition, we recommend establishment of at least one contact group on communication and resource mobilization in order to develop strategies to raise the resources required to put our words into action.

Similar ideas have been brought forward by other delegations, the UN and civil society in the past, and we shall be pleased to consider all options that will help us advance the issue.

Mr. Chairman, the United Nations Programme of Action is a valuable framework document - a foundation - upon which we can and must build.

In some instances this has to involve the negotiation of subsidiary agreements with real obligations and hard targets. In others, it will be more appropriate to establish guidelines that reflect international best practices.

Among the critically important thematic areas that require further attention are: (i) transfer controls and brokering (ii) national regulation including civilian possession (iii) appropriate use by officials and security forces (iv) stockpile management and destruction (v) disarmament and demobilization of combatants and their full re-integration into civil society.

We must better understand and address factors that give rise to demand for such weapons in the first place, including gender, since men, particularly young men, are the primary perpetrators and victims of gun violence.

We need to further explore linkages with other areas of peace and human security, human rights, and international development.

We need to strengthen the global partnership that has emerged on this issue – a partnership that involves governments, the United Nations, international financial institutions, international organizations such as the ICRC, NGOs from around the world, and representatives from industry and firearms owners themselves – and welcome their participation in this meeting and the Review Conference.

We need to continue to cultivate the culture of openness, transparency and inclusiveness in our deliberations, while respecting obvious differences in roles and responsibilities.

We need to respect the right of nations to protect themselves, of legitimate producers, brokers and retailers to do business, and of responsible individuals to own and use firearms within clear parameters.

We need to build consensus on the way forward, while remaining determined to maintain the highest possible standards in what we expect to achieve in years to come, and to move at the fastest pace that the majority of the world's nations can muster.

And, we need to act, deliberately but prudently, guided by international humanitarian law and the principles of human civility that bind us, to bring an end to the carnage wrought by misuse of these weapons.

In short, Mr. Chairman, we need to re-double our efforts to fulfil the promise of the UN Programme of Action and, in so doing, protect innocent people throughout the world.

The Canadian delegation looks forward to working with all here to this end.

Thank You