



*Statement of the League of Arab States
by Mr. Wael Al-Assad,
Director of Multilateral Relations,*

*Before
the Preparatory Committee United Nations Conference
to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the
Program of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate
the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in
All Its Aspects*

Check Against Delivery

New York 9-20/1/2006



Statement by Mr. Wael Al-Assad, Director of Multilateral Relations at the League of Arab States, before the Preparatory Committee United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Program of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects

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Mr. Chairman,

Allow me, at the outset, to join all previous speakers in extending my warmest congratulations to you, as well as the members of the bureau, on your election to chair this Preparatory Committee to the Review Conference. We are confident that your wise leadership and vast experience will lead us through this important meeting to reach unanimously accepted results.

Mr. Chairman,

In spite of the fact that the reasons, dimensions and ramifications of the problems of the illicit trade in SALW vary and differ from one state to another in the Arab region, as some suffer greatly while in others the problem is almost non-existent, yet there is a growing awareness among all Arab states that this problem, being sometimes a trans-border problem, requires coordinated regional effort to back up national efforts. The Arab States have started, within the League of Arab States, studying the different implications of the problem of illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, in order to identify national needs, and to coordinate and cooperate at the regional level. The Arab states initiated its regional coordination by establishing the Regional Focal Point at the League of Arab States. I would like here to emphasize that the Arab states, during the last three years, did achieve significant progress at the regional level, which is a clear indication of increasing awareness among all Arab states with the importance of tackling the problem comprehensively and to try to provide regional solutions to the problem. Allow me to shed light on a few of these regional efforts:

First: the Council of Arab Interior Ministers and the Council of Arab Justice Ministers tackled the problem, particularly its legislative side, within the "Arab Strategy for Combating Terrorism" and the "Arab Convention for Combating Terrorism". As a result, a model Arab Law for Firearms, Ammunitions and Explosives was adopted, in 2002.

Second: Since the adoption of the 2001 PoA, 14 Arab states established national focal points. We expect the number to increase as we approach the Review Conference.

Third: the League of Arab States focused, in the previous period, on raising the awareness with the problem, identifying needs at the national level, and building its capacities as a regional organization to be able to provide assistance to the member states. The Arab League implemented the following activities:

- In cooperation with the UN/DDA, the Arab League held in Cairo, December 2003, a joint conference as a follow-up on the Implementation of the PoA by the Arab States. The Cairo conference represented a turning point for the Arab region in raising the awareness with the problem, in identifying needs, and in coordination of efforts and exchanging information.
- In light of the Cairo conference which highlighted, inter alia, capacity building needs at the regional level, the Governments of Germany and Switzerland agreed to support financially and technically part of the initial phase of establishing a Regional Focal Point at the Arab League. The Arab League expresses appreciation for this important assistance.
- In September 2004, the Council of the League, at the level of Foreign Ministers, adopted in its 122 Ordinary Session, Resolution (6447) regarding "Arab Coordination to Combat the Illicit Trade in Small Arms".
- In October 2004, the League officially announced the establishment of its Regional Focal Point. Its first activity was holding an experts meeting to identify its mission and objectives.

Mr. Chairman,

Three weeks ago, the Regional Focal Point held "The First Meeting for Arab National Focal Points". A number of important conclusions and recommendations were adopted. Some of these recommendations focused on regional coordination and the role of the Arab League. The League was requested to hold regular annual meetings for national focal points, organize regional training courses in areas of common interest, and establish a data base and a regional information network within the Arab League. The meeting also requested the Arab League to conduct relevant research and devise awareness campaigns. These recommendations will be submitted to the Arab League Council, with a recommendation to integrate and mainstream the small arms issue in the humanitarian and developmental activities of the League.

Mr. Chairman,

Almost five years passed since the adoption of the PoA in 2001. There is no doubt that the Review Conference represents an important opportunity for evaluation and assessment. There are major achievements in implementing the PoA in many regions, yet there are many obstacles as well facing progress at the national, regional and international levels. In spite of the progress that has been achieved, the

published figures on the various dimensions of the problem remain frightening and unacceptable. This is why we realize that what has been achieved falls short of what is required., and that we need to work together to provide the convenient environment for proper implementation of the PoA and increase international cooperation and assistance, to help different regions to implement the UN PoA, taking into consideration the special needs and circumstances of each region.

In spite of the clarity of the problem and human suffering associated with it, yet the adoption of the PoA was not an easy process. The international community went through long and difficult negotiations until we reached a unanimously accepted document, and though it does not satisfy the ambitions of all the parties, yet it is a model of the pragmatic solutions that could be reached through multilateral negotiations. Therefore it is imperative to preserve and protect this important document and to focus on its implementation without attempting to renegotiate it once more.

Mr. Chairman,

The Arab States has confirmed, once again, its commitment to its unified position that was declared in 2001, which was adopted by the conference and included in the PoA in paragraphs 9,10, 11, 12, and 17, particularly its reference to the importance of preserving international priorities in the field of disarmament, namely Nuclear Disarmament, and stressing the right of nations to self determination, particularly those nations that are still under foreign occupation, and the right of those nation to self defense. Lastly, the need to tackle the roots of the conflicts that lies in the social, economic, political, and ethnic, or religious problems in different regions and societies. It is within the parameters of these requirements that the Arab states fully commit themselves to the implementation of the PoA, and seek to support international efforts in its fight against this scourge to humanity.

Mr. Chairman,

The efforts of the League of Arab States are gaining momentum as a result of growing awareness and determination by its member states. Finally, allow me, Mr. Chairman, to wish you every success in your efforts.

Thank you.