

The Netherlands and United Kingdom joint statement on small arms and development for the United Nations Preparatory Committee of the Review Conference on 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, 13 January 2006, New York

Mr Chairman,

The Programme of Action states that "the illicit manufacture, transfer and circulation of small arms and light weapons and their excessive accumulation and uncontrolled spread (...) have a wide range of humanitarian and socio-economic consequences and pose a serious threat to (...) sustainable development."

Yet, small arms and light weapons do not in themselves hold back development. We know very well that the fact that weapons are prevalent in society does not prevent people from making a living, sending children to school, or getting medical treatment. But the damage and destruction perpetrated using small arms and light weapons do have a profound effect on the poor and excluded around the world.

Where weapons are not properly regulated, they are often used indiscriminately by or against ordinary civilians. Increasingly powerful weapons are becoming more widely available. Uncontrolled weapons in an unstable or crime-ridden area often catalyse outbreaks of armed violence that shatter any semblance of security. The poor suffer most because they do not have the resources to protect themselves – or their livelihoods – in times of insecurity. In situations of extreme deprivation, aid agencies cannot reach the needy because levels of armed violence are so high.

Mr Chairman,

The Programme of Action recognises the need to curb the illicit small arms trade as a necessary pre-condition for sustainable development. Since 2001 many countries and regions have made considerable progress in fulfilling their commitments under the PoA. However further assistance for small arms reduction and capacity development is desperately needed. By rooting such assistance within a wider development context, we can ensure that it is more sustainable and effective while at the same time creating new opportunities for states to implement the PoA.

Mr Chairman,

We endorse the proposals made by Austria on behalf of the European Union to develop an integrated vision of the negative humanitarian and development impact of the illicit small arms trade. We will be circulating a joint Netherlands - UK working paper which expands on some of these proposals.

Specifically, we would like to emphasize three key policy areas:

- Firstly, national action plans or other small arms reduction initiatives should be integrated into national security strategies and poverty reduction frameworks, acknowledging that the reduction of illicit small arms and of armed violence is closely linked to the provision of personal and economic security.
- Secondly, as small arms and light weapons present a significant risk in post conflict situations and hold back reconstruction, recovery and development, small arms and light weapons should be an integral part of post conflict reconstruction plans and peace-building strategies. The newly established Peace Building Commission should see to the implementation hereof.
- Thirdly, furthering the progress of the United Nations in its development and implementation of DDR programmes, DDR programmes should be developed that include wider measures, such as safe storage and disposal. These require proper sequencing as part of post conflict recovery.

We urge states to take these ideas forward during the Review Conference. We also call for the formulation of guidance through the OECD's Development Assistance Committee on how best to integrate small arms measures into development frameworks. The UNPoA could provide a useful basis for this guidance.

I thank you, Mr Chairman.