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Statement by Mr. Ammar Hijazi, Second Secretary, Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, before: the 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, 12 January 2005:

Thank you Mr. Chairman,

Allow me first to begin by congratulating you and members of the bureau in chairing this important meeting and wishing you success in facilitating the discussions of the Preparatory Committee. Second, I would like to point out that my delegation fully associates itself with the statement made by Morocco on behalf of the Member States of the Arab League.

In the interest of time, I will make my comments brief and limit them to a few important issues that we believe deserve the review and attention of the upcoming Review Conference in June.

We believe it is of crucial importance to review the implications of underdevelopment and poverty on the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons around the world. The social and economic conditions produced by underdevelopment and abject poverty produce fertile grounds for a host of illicit trades. It is very important to note that in order to combat the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons, we must fight the factors that either cause or encourage it.

Additionally, the convening members must address the indiscriminate policies of countries that feed civil wars, drug lords, and other sources of conflict in the world. These conflicts are not just fueled by illicit trade. Instead, individual countries that make a policy choice of selling weapons to countries mired in civil war or other conflicts also fuel violence and contribute to the problem at hand.

Mr. Chairman,

When implementing the Program of Action, we must keep in mind that this Program of Action and the serious international efforts to implement it are directly related to relevant International Law instruments, including International Humanitarian Law. In this regard, we point to countries that gravely violate the Fourth Geneva Convention. This is particularly relevant to Occupying Powers who do not respect their obligations towards International Law and who use excessive force against the civilian population, including the extra-judicial execution of persons and the bombing of populated areas. Hence, we believe that the Review Conference should afford due attention to two important issues:

1. Implementing the Plan of Action can not be in contravention of existing International Laws and provisions, especially International Humanitarian Law.
2. The Plan of Action and its implementation mechanisms must not adversely affect the rights of peoples to self-defense and self-determination.

P R E S S R E L E A S E

Related to the issue I just discussed Mr. Chairman is the atmosphere of hostility, tension, and perpetual conflict that has been imposed on the Palestinian People in particular and the Middle East in general due to the presence of a belligerent occupation that transgresses upon the rights, lives, property, land, and sovereignty of others. This atmosphere makes the region susceptible to the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons.

Mr. Chairman,

The issue of human suffering, whether caused by the weapons of regular or irregular forces, is one that also deserves our attention and commitment, since the suffering caused by either is real and usually devastating. Small arms and light weapons are just as devastating when used by a regular army against a civilian population and in contravention of international law, specifically the Fourth Geneva Convention as they when used by irregular forces.

In this regard, we must also point out that the arming and protection of militias that reside unlawfully in an occupied land must be addressed here as these militias are involved in causing untold suffering and violence amongst the defenseless and occupied civilian population. These militias own small arms that are state-sanctioned and at times state-funded. In turn, these weapons only feed the on-going conflict on the ground and perpetuate the occupation.

Finally Mr. Chairman, the Plan of Action must be addressed in its comprehensive context, which includes other important agreements and conventions on disarmament, which also require implementation. All these issues, combined and separate, are essential contributors to the fueling of illicit small arms trade and the devastating effects these small arms and light weapons have on entire societies – and all these issues deserve the attention and action of the upcoming Conference.

Thank you