



SRI LANKA

STATEMENT

by

SRI LANKA DELEGATION

At

General Debate

**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
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Mr. Chairman,

Allow me, at the outset, to extend to you our warmest congratulations on your election as Chairman of the Preparatory Committee. You are assured of the fullest cooperation and support of my Delegation. My congratulations also go to the other members of the Bureau.

The key challenge before us is to curb the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons that endanger the security and stability of all States, hinder economic growth and development and promote terrorism, violence and organized crime. In this regard, I would like to recall the Final Declaration of the 12th NAM Summit held in Kuala Lumpur in February 2003 in which the Heads of State or Government called on all States *"to ensure that the supply of small arms and light weapons is limited only to Governments or to entities duly authorized by Governments and to implement legal restrictions on the unrestricted trade in and ownership of small arms and light weapons."* The distinction must be made, between on the one hand, the illicit trade in SALW, and on the other, the legitimate purchase by Governments of SALW essential for national security purposes.

We believe that the role of the State in this regard could be viewed as a part of a continued and comprehensive international effort to find ways and means to address the issue through the formulation of new international norms as well as strict implementation of existing ones. Such an effort should also recognize the right of the State to manufacture, import and retain small arms and light weapons for self-defence and for legitimate security needs. We share the view that the responsibilities of arms transfers need to be spelled out in a more coherent fashion by the international community to prevent legal transfers of small arms from ending up at the hands of non-State actors.

Sri Lanka is unreservedly committed to the full and effective implementation of the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in

Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. Following the adoption of the UNPOA in 2001, Sri Lanka was the first country in the South Asian region to set-up a National Commission on Small Arms. The National Commission established in October 2004, consists of all stakeholders in the Government and includes representatives from civil society as well. My delegation wishes to express its appreciation to the UN Department of Disarmament Affairs and the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs for providing financial and technical assistance for the setting-up of the National Commission. Sri Lanka actively participated in the deliberations of the first and the second Biennial Meetings of the States on the implementation of the UNPOA, including by submitting two comprehensive reports at those meetings on the national implementation of the UNPOA. A third report on action taken in Sri Lanka since July 2005 will be submitted to the Review Conference this year.

Sri Lanka considers the issue of assistance for national capacity building as essential for the effective implementation of the PoA, especially in the case of developing countries. In this context, we wish to commend the substantial financial and technical assistance provided so far by the UN and other international organizations and donor States. Capacity building is a key to the success of the UN Programme of Action and the Programme of Action envisages cooperation among governments, international organizations, regional organizations and civil society.

The proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons continues to be a serious threat to peace, stability and sustainable development in many countries and regions in the world, and affecting large civilian populations and vulnerable groups like children, women and the elderly.

Sri Lanka believes that this issue cannot be addressed in all its aspects by only making States accountable under various national, regional and international regimes. The illicit use of small arms is an issue essentially connected with non-State actors. Therefore, new approaches in making non-State actors accountable

for the violations of human rights as a result of their use of small arms and light weapons have to be pursued. In this connection, while ensuring effective establishment of adequate national, regional and international controls, more work should be undertaken to explore all possibilities, both legal and moral, of making non-State actors accountable for the illegal transfer and use of small arms and light weapons.

One of the most blatant human rights violations, that is a direct consequence of the proliferation of SALW, is the forced conscription of children as armed combatants. The weight and size of small arms makes them easy for even a child as young as 8 years old to use, and encourages the forced conscription of children as armed combatants. UNICEF and national and international human rights organizations have widely reported that there has been a sharp increase in such recruitment of children in recent months. In such conscription drives, by non-State actors, including in my country, more often than not, children have been removed against their will from schools, from welfare centres and makeshift camps. Security Council Resolution 1612 symbolises the growing consensus at the UN on taking punitive actions against violators of the rights of children in armed conflicts.

My delegation has taken note of the discussions and deliberations that have taken place during the last several years on the issue of international controls on the transfer of small arms and light weapons. In fact, several weeks ago, Sri Lanka hosted an international meeting on this issue, in collaboration with the Government of the United Kingdom, in which some 14 countries from Asia, Africa and Latin America participated. One of the recommendations contained in the Co-chairs' Summary Record of this meeting is the need to address in a comprehensive and transparent manner all issues within the UNPOA, in which marking and tracing, non-State actors and brokering are among the important ones.

While consolidating the achievements we have made so far in implementing the UNPOA, it is the hope of my delegation that the forthcoming Review Conference will identify a set of realistic and achievable targets and will make specific and concrete recommendations for their implementation at the national, regional and global levels. In this regard, concrete measures are required to further strengthen the UNPOA implementation for follow-up action for 2006 and beyond. In this connection, my delegation would like to emphasize the need to strengthen provisions in the PoA that would prevent SALW from reaching non-State actors and being used to forcibly conscript children as armed combatants.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, UNDDA estimates that of 49 major conflicts in the 1990s, 47 were waged with small arms as the weapons of choice and that small arms are responsible for over half a million deaths per year. The indiscriminate and illegal use of arms affects civilian populations, especially the most vulnerable groups in society, such as women, children and the elderly. In this context, it is imperative that we, the Member States of the United Nations, take all necessary steps to implement the Programme of Action to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, in all its aspects.

Thank You.
