PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE TO THE UNITED NATIONS

245 East 49th Street • New York, NY 10017

STATEMENT

by

Ambassador Sylvester E. Rowe

In the First Committee Thematic Debate on Conventional Weapons

New York, 23rd October 2007

Check Against Delivery
Mr. Chairman,

Let me begin by reiterating the position of Sierra Leone that the existence and proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons, not of just destruction, but of so-called mass destruction, continue to pose the greatest threat to humanity. However, the excessive accumulation, uncontrolled circulation and illicit trade in conventional weapons, including small arms and light weapons and ammunition, do not only pose a serious threat but more importantly continue to kill and maim millions of people throughout the world today.

On the one hand we are surrounded by huge arsenals of so-called weapons of mass destruction — some of which are on high alert for deployment. At the same time conventional weapons are inflicting massive destruction of human life, including the lives of innocent people. What an ominous situation!

Sierra Leone, for its part and consistent with its commitment to the maintenance of peace and security at the sub-regional, regional and global levels has made every effort to sign and ratify various instruments for the control of armaments. Since the theme of this thematic debate is “conventional weapons” I should mention for example that we are a Party to the CCW and its protocol, including those pertaining to explosive remnants of war, mines, booby-traps and other devices. We are also a State party the Ottawa Convention (and have destroyed the small quantity of anti-personnel landmines that we inherited from a military regime), and will soon ratify the new ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons.

Mr. Chairman, it is pertinent to ask: what is the purpose of all our resolutions, declarations, codes of conduct and conventions on disarmament and non-proliferation? Sierra Leone believes that the basis, the rationale of every disarmament and non-proliferation instrument is and should be human security. Disarmament or arms control is not so much about the principle of sovereignty and national interest. It is about the lives and livelihood of people; in short, human survival.

This is the approach my delegation takes in its contribution to this thematic debate on conventional weapons, a contribution which we would like to devote exclusively to the proposal for establishing common standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional arms, or an Arms Trade Treaty (ATT).

Mr. Chairman, I am sure that no one was surprised when Sierra Leone registered its full support for the proposal by co-sponsoring Resolution 61/89 adopted by the General Assembly last December. For obvious reasons Sierra Leone has been in the forefront of efforts at the regional, sub-regional and international levels aimed at addressing the proliferation, excessive accumulation and illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

Mr. Chairman, Sierra Leone supports the proposal for a legally-binding instrument establishing common international standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional weapons, for one and only one reason, namely, human security — to enhance
the safety, security and welfare of people. As we see it, the rational for such a treaty is not merely to fill a gap in international arms trade transactions, but more importantly, as Resolution 61/89 states clearly, because the absence of common international standards on the import, export and transfer of conventional arms is a contributory factor to conflict, the displacement of people, crime and terrorism, thereby undermining peace, reconciliation, safety, security, stability and sustainable development.

Mr. Chairman, human security is at the centre of the proposal for an international arms trade treaty. The 2001 United Nations Programme of Action to Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small and Arms and Light Weapons in All is Aspects, which currently enjoys universal acceptance and support, is also centered on human security. In that document didn’t we express our concern about the wide range of humanitarian and socio-economic consequences of the illicit manufacture, transfer and circulation of that notorious category of conventional arms referred to as small arms and light weapons? Didn’t we also in the Programme Action express grave concern about the devastating consequences of that phenomenon on our children?

Mr. Chairman, in the view of the Sierra Leone delegation, all those member States that supported the Programme of Action should now support the idea of working with us in the process of devising an international arms trade treaty. The objective is the same – common standards in the wider interest of humanity.

We believe that an arms trade treaty is not only feasible; it is necessary, absolutely necessary.

From the last year’s debate in the First Committee on the subject, and from the views submitted by States to the Secretary-General in response to Resolution 61/89 on the feasibility, scope and draft parameters of the proposed instrument, we can conclude that it is time to take the next bold step on what would obviously be a negotiating process towards the objective of a legally-binding instrument establishing common standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional weapons.

Mr. Chairman, as the saying goes, we are not trying to re-invent the wheel. We already have various instruments, best practices guidelines, protocols, model regulations, and codes of conduct, arrangements and conventions at the regional and sub-regional levels, including the new ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, their ammunition or related materials. A solid foundation has been laid for the proposed arms trade treaty.

Mr. Chairman, my delegation would like to appeal to all those States that have expressed strong reservations about the idea of such a treaty and even the idea of starting the process, to reconsider their positions. We agree that it is a complicated issue. We are aware that the process of negotiations could be lengthy.

All we ask is for them to join us in starting the process. They will have the opportunity to participate in a process that will be transparent and open-ended; an opportunity to address
the content and detailed provisions of the proposed instrument, in the interest of peace and security of peoples everywhere.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.