STATMENT

BY

HIS EXCELLENCY MR. STEVE D. MATENJE, SC,
AMBASSADOR AND PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF THE REPUBLIC OF MALAWI TO THE UNITED NATIONS

DURING THE

THEMATIC DEBATE
ON CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS

FIRST COMMITTEE
SIXTY-SECOND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

NEW YORK, 29 OCTOBER, 2007

(Check against delivery)
Mr. Chairman,

Since my delegation is taking the floor for the first time, let me begin by congratulating you and your bureau upon your well-deserved election. I am confident that under your leadership, the work of this Committee will come to a successful conclusion.

Mr. Chairman,

Malawi has, over recent years witnessed an increased and alarming flow of small arms and light weapons from conflict-afflicted areas particularly in Africa. The flow of small arms and light weapons into Malawi continue to cause fear amongst the citizens due to the corresponding increase in armed robberies, burglaries, gender-based violence and other violent crimes such as car jacking which until recently were unheard of in Malawi. Furthermore, our natural resources, including wildlife are being decimated by the reckless use of illegal weapons by poachers in our game parks and other areas. The result is that the economy is harmed as Malawi relies on these resources to boost its tourism industry and preserve its natural heritage.

Mr. Chairman,

We view the continued supply of small arms and light weapons as a real threat to peace and security not only of our country but the whole of Africa where they are used to perpetuate armed conflicts, armed crime, cause immense casualties and create massive refugee flows. These arms are used to commit serious violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and to undermine and prevent sustainable economic growth and development. They are a catalyst of armed violence.

The economic costs of armed violence represent resources lost to society that could have been invested in projects that benefit the economy and population and reduce poverty in Africa. On the contrary, economic growth and the livelihoods of the people in Africa are being held back by armed violence. Yet, the vast majority of arms used to commit armed violence come from outside Africa. Accordingly, the disarmament community must play its part by assisting to remove illegal arms and prevent armed violence to help Africa achieve the internationally agreed goals including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in a peaceful and secure environment.

With regard to the vast amount of money lost to armed violence in Africa, I can do no better than quote the words of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia in her Foreword to Briefing Paper Number 107 entitled “Africa’s missing billions” which was launched on October 11, 2007. I quote:

“This is money Africa can ill afford to lose. The sums are appalling: The price that Africa is paying could cover the cost of
solving the HIV and AIDS crisis in Africa, or provide education, water and prevention and treatment for TB and malaria. Literally thousands of hospitals, schools, and roads could have been built, positively affecting millions of people. Not only do the people of Africa suffer the physical horrors of violence, armed conflict undermines their efforts to escape poverty.” Unquote.

Mr. Chairman,

Apart from the immeasurable harm that the illegal use of small arms and light weapons inflict on populations, they are also a contributing factor to the spread of global terrorism which, in most cases is fanned by socio-economic deprivation and increasing poverty and desperation as well as racial, ethnic and religious intolerance. In this regard, we would like to associate ourselves with the call for the establishment of an effective international regime to regulate the manufacture and transfer of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition. We believe that the unregulated availability of small arms and light weapons leads to a breakdown of the rule of law, democracy and legitimate State structures.

Accordingly, we support ongoing efforts towards the elaboration of an Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). We believe that this would be a significant step towards the standardization of international trade in conventional arms and ensuring that those weapons do not end up in wrong hands or used for illegal activities. Therefore, we expect that the ATT will control both the supply of and demand for conventional weapons, and call upon African governments, arms-producing countries, and the rest of the international community, to vigorously and proactively support international discussions to achieve a robust ATT that will protect Africa from the daily effects of armed violence. We all have a duty to ensure swift progress towards a strong and effective ATT.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion we wish to draw attention to the fact that in Africa hundreds of thousands of people particularly innocent women and children have been killed, maimed and lost limbs. In addition, agricultural land has been rendered unusable due to the presence of landmines. We call on the international community to continue to assist to clear those lands of the mines and train African experts in mines-related accident prevention.

I thank you for your attention.