Cooperating to Disarm

Statement by

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Mr. Chairman,

At the outset I wish to join delegates who have taken the floor before me, to extend the Regional Centre on small Arms’ congratulations on your election to preside over this Committee during the current General Assembly session. Through you, may I also congratulate the entire Bureau and pledge the support and cooperation of the Regional Centre on Small Arms’ (RECSA).

Mr. Chairman,

Disarmament remains an indispensable tool to help create a secure environment that is favourable for human development, as enshrined in the letter and the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations. Indeed, arms control and disarmament issues are critical to the peace and security in Africa and the World at large.

The primary objective of practical disarmament measures is more effective control over the frequently used tools of combat. It ensures that these arms are used to re-ignite intra and interstate conflict.

Mr. Chairman,

RECSA is working in close collaboration with the United Nations Regional Centre for peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC) supporting efforts to build the capacity of countries to undertake effective disarmament. In addition, RECSA is also working with other international and regional bodies to consolidate gains in controlling the problem of small arms in the continent. In partnership with United Nations Office of Disarmament (UNODA0, RECSA organized a follow up meeting to the BMS 3 in Kigali, Rwanda that brought together representative from the Member States of Great Lakes, Horn of Africa and the SADC regions.
Mr. Chairman,

RECSA Member States have continued to undertake measures both internally and jointly across borders to control the number of arms in the wrong hands. Allow me therefore, to highlight the experiences of a cross section of our member States.

Mr. Chairman, through funding from UNDP, the Burundi National Focal Point on Small Arms Control and Management has been implementing a project to raise awareness among civilians to boost disarmament program and the fight against proliferation of SALW. Relevant programs for public awareness to improve the level of voluntary surrender of illegal weapons have been conducted with much success. Many citizens are now turning up at collection centres to give up arms acquired during Burundi’s period of conflict.

In Kenya the President, His Excellency Mwai Kibaki, has recently issued an order requiring disciplined forces to disarm civilian in possession of illegal arms, while calling on those citizens owning such weapons to surrender them or face prosecution. Although disarmament activities have been taking place periodically in areas most affected by high numbers of illegal firearms there has been a recent need to give impetus to disarmament efforts in light of the increasing number of firearms flowing into the country from neighbouring states in conflict.

Mr. Chairman,

In Rwanda, the disarming of returnee combatants form the DRC is recognized as a priority by the Government in an effort to mop up illegally held arms. In addition, members of the public who may be in possession of illegal arms are encouraged to surrender them or report to the law enforcement agencies. In exchange, the Government is promoting income generating activities in view of
the fact that armed violence hinders and retards sustainable development while at the same time poverty increases the potential for armed violence.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the National Focal Point on Small Arms Control and Management has been working closely with a national NGO to collect arms surrendered from citizens. Sensitization workshops are held to raise awareness about the disarmament exercise in those parts of the country severely affected by a large number of illegal arms.

Mr. Chairman,

Somalia has been devastated by years continued violence and instability. There is now a renewed sense of hope that the final reconciliation corner has been turned. An internationally supported Unity Government was formed in Djibouti early this year with a subsequent move of all its institutions to the capital city, Mogadishu. However, the existence of an estimated 60,000 militia constraints state building efforts and necessitates the urge for a comprehensive Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program. In a renewed effort and as part of security sector reform measures, the National Unity Government has recently formed the Ministry of DDR, whose focus will be to lead and coordinate all efforts on Militia DDR. There is need therefore, for the International Community to support Somalia in this respect.

Sudan has established disarmament commissions for both the North and the South. The two bodies are coordinating disarmament among citizens and ex-combatants in the two parts of the country to mop up arms left in illegal possession of citizens after the end of a 21 year war. The disarmament challenge is great in Sudan; nevertheless the Government is unrelenting in efforts to control the number of illegal arms among citizens. It is expected that a combination of disarmament and comprehensive small arms control measures will enhance security in the country.
The Government of Uganda has undertaken destruction of large numbers of assorted small arms and light weapons, ammunition and unexploded ordnances to ensure they do not find their way into illegal circulation. The Government has put in place disarmament and development programme in one of the most affected regions by the small arms problem. The programme is a comprehensive plan that focuses on a range of issues that influence the availability and access to small arms.

Mr. Chairman,

With funding from the Japan Government, RESCA will provide further support to Member States by boosting their capacity to undertake disarmament. The one year project Enhancing Human Security in the Great Lakes Region and Horn of Africa by Preventing Proliferation of Illicit Small Arms through Practical Disarmament will see Member States receive training in the area of disarmament and stockpile management including creating and maintaining small arms database for effective record keeping. Member States will in addition contribute to the development of best practice guidelines on disarmament that will standardize disarmament process in the region.

Mr. Chairman,

RECSA is also engaged in other measures to control the problem of small arms in its member states. We have donated two machines to each Member state to facilitate arms making of legally held arms. The machines were purchased with funds from the US Government and the Germany Government through the East African Community/GTZ partnership. The arms marking exercise is in line with the requirements of the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms in all its Aspects and the Nairobi Protocol being implemented in the Great Lakes Region, the Horn of Africa and Bordering States. Marking ensures enhanced stockpile management and easy tracing of arms.
RECSA has supported seven countries to develop their National Action Plans on Small Arms Control and Management (NAPs). Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania have had their plans in place for a number of years and implementation is in progress. Rwanda and Burundi completed the development process in a year and are now embarking on implementation. The Djibouti draft document is currently under discussion. The Eritrea document is under review by a national team. The next country to focus for NAP development is Ethiopia. These strategies will, in addition to addressing other issues, on SALW guide countries when conducting disarmament exercises.

RECSA would like to thank the support received from the Member States and in particular the Kenya Government for hosting the Secretariat. The Governments of UK, Germany through GTZ partnership, Netherlands, Norway, USA, Japan, Belgium, Canada and the UNDP for funding the activities to fight the illicit proliferation illicit SALW in the Great Lakes, Horn of Africa and Bordering States.

I thank you.