New York, 18 March 2013 - Secretary-General's remarks to Final United Nations Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty

Let me begin by congratulating Ambassador Peter Woolcott of Australia on his election as President of the Final United Nations Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty.

President Woolcott, I commend your diplomatic skills in forging an agreement on outstanding procedural issues. I am confident that your continuing leadership will help bring the Arms Trade Treaty process to its successful conclusion.

After a very long journey, our final destination is in sight – a robust Arms Trade Treaty.

It is a long time coming.

The trade in conventional arms touches on many complex matters of commerce, national security, human rights and humanitarian law and policy.

This is no doubt a difficult issue. Yet the absence of the rule of law in the conventional arms trade defies explanation.

We have international standards regulating everything from t-shirts to toys to tomatoes.

There are international regulations for furniture. That means there are common standards for the global trade in armchairs but not the global trade in arms.

Families and communities around the world have paid a heavy price.

We know this at the United Nations because poorly regulated international arms deals directly affect every dimension of our work.

They undermine sustainable development. They foster armed conflict and undercut our peacekeeping, peacebuilding and humanitarian efforts. They lead to massive human rights violations and threaten gender empowerment.

Armed violence kills more than half a million people each year – including 66,000 women and girls.

Meanwhile various non-state groups are adding to their arsenals. Some drug cartels in Latin America now outgun the armies of entire countries.

All of these tragedies raise the same questions.

Where were these weapons produced?

Were they properly licensed for export or re-transfer?
What standards were used to authorize such transfers?

And, perhaps the biggest question of all is simply this: What are we going to do about it?

You have come together to do something about it.

An effective and strong ATT will require exporting countries to assess the risk that weapons will be used to commit grave violations of international humanitarian law or even fuel conflict.

The ATT will put warlords, pirates, human rights abusers, organized criminals, terrorists and gun runners on notice.

It will be more difficult for these outlaws to obtain weapons because all States Parties will be required to establish adequate systems for controlling the trade in arms and ammunition.

But the merits of this Treaty go even further.

It will also strengthen the rule of law by contributing to the development of an emerging network of international norms against trafficking, misuse, and the illicit proliferation of weapons and ammunition.

This Treaty would further complement and supplement existing international tools from the Programme of Action on Small Arms to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and beyond.

As you begin your historic work, I believe there is widespread understanding that you are not here to initiate new negotiations. You are here to strengthen and conclude the work that has been done in earnest since the beginning of the ATT process in 2006.

That is the clear message of the General Assembly when it decided that this is the Final United Nations Conference on the ATT.

Last July’s Conference in New York came close to reaching an agreement on a draft treaty text. We must now build on this work and conclude our historic journey over the next nine days.

Now is the time to overcome past setbacks and deliver.

Now is the time for the focus and political will to negotiate the final details of the treaty and arrive at a consensus outcome by 28 March.

We owe this landmark UN treaty to those who have fallen victim to armed conflict and violence … to all the children deprived of a better future … and to all those risking their lives to build peace and make this a better world.

You have my full support. I thank you for your commitment and leadership. Thank you very much.