New York, 3 July 2012 - Secretary-General’s remarks to the Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty

Ambassador Moritán, I would like to express my sincere congratulations once again on your election.

Ambassador Moritán and I have been working very closely for a long time. I have known him in his various capacities in the Argentinian Government. Thus I know him very well – his vision, his commitment and his leadership. I am confident that, under his very wise leadership, he will be able to lead this conference toward a great success.

I would like, again, to thank you for your patience.

In this type of very important conference [with] multilateral organizations, it is not uncommon that Member States have some different views on certain issues. I only hope that you will exercise your wisdom and common vision and commitment to work for the common humanity. The whole international community is watching how this conference will come out at the end of this month-long discussion, on July 27th. I sincerely hope that, Mr. President, you will exercise your leadership and, with the full cooperation and sense of flexibility and common sense, to agree to a legally binding arms trade treaty at the end of this. This is my earnest hope and appeal to all delegations here who have come [from far] and wide, from all different parts of the world.

I also want to convey my special thanks to the many civil society organizations here today for your vigorous support for an Arms Trade Treaty. You have helped capture the imagination and energy of millions.

Everyone in this room is making history. I am very encouraged and impressed by such fully packed delegations. This is the largest conference room we can provide at this time, except the General Assembly Hall. Again I really thank you for your engagement – this is a very positive engagement

For the first time, Member States are gathering at the United Nations to negotiate a treaty regulating the international conventional arms trade.

It is important. It is impressive. And it is long overdue.

We have made some progress on weapons of mass destruction issues over the years. But the international community has not kept pace on conventional arms.

Yes, nuclear issues always capture headlines. But conventional arms are killing people everyday without much attention.

We have made headway in tackling the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and in enhancing transparency in conventional armaments.

We have the Programme of Action on Small Arms and the Firearms Protocol.
We have an instrument to facilitate cooperation in tracking illicit small arms and light weapons. And we also have the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms.

Yet we do not have a multilateral treaty of global scope dealing with conventional arms.

This is a disgrace.

Poorly regulated international arms transfers are fuelling civil conflicts, destabilizing regions, and empowering terrorists and criminal networks.

Addressing the threat of conventional weapons should not be an unconventional act by the international community.

Together, we must act.

The world is over-armed and peace is under-funded.

Military spending is on the rise. Today, it is well above US $1 trillion a year.

Let us look at Africa alone. Between 1990 and 2005, twenty-three African countries lost an estimated US $284 billion as a result of armed conflicts, fuelled by transfers of ammunition and arms – 95 per cent of which came from outside Africa.

And globally, sixty years of United Nations peacekeeping operations have cost less than six weeks of current military spending.

Everyday, we at the United Nations see the human toll of an absence of regulations or lax controls on the arms trade.

We see it in the suffering of civilian populations trapped by armed conflict or pervasive crime.

We see it in the killing and wounding of civilians – including children, the most vulnerable of all.

We see it in the massive displacement of people within and across borders.

We see it through grave violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law.

Poorly regulated trade in weaponry is a major obstacle to everything we do.

For example, the delivery of emergency assistance is often disrupted by armed threats and attacks against United Nations staff and other humanitarian organizations.

In the last decade, nearly 800 humanitarian workers were killed in armed attacks.
An agreed set of standards for arms exports, along with strict national legislation, can help begin to change all of that.

But it will do even more. It will improve our ability to deliver across the board:

From promoting social and economic development to supporting peacekeeping and peacebuilding; from monitoring sanctions and arms embargoes to protecting children and civilians; from promoting women’s empowerment to fostering the rule of law.

Let us face facts. The task before you is extremely complex. There is a daunting array of challenges.

The global arms trade touches on core national interests. There are legitimate concerns and diverse perspectives at play.

You have difficult questions to tackle.

For example, you will need to agree on robust criteria that would help lessen the risk that transferred weapons are used to commit violations of international humanitarian law or human rights.

You will also need to define the scope of the Treaty to cover a comprehensive array of weapons and activities and that leaves no room for loopholes.

Our common goal is clear: a robust and legally binding Arms Trade Treaty that will have a real impact on the lives of those millions of people suffering from the consequences of armed conflict, repression and armed violence.

It is ambitious – but I believe it is achievable.

It will take flexibility, good faith and the best from all of us.

But we must aim for nothing less.

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

For them and for our common future – let us make the most of this historic moment.

I count on your leadership and commitment.