

Statement by
H.E. Dr. Sylvester Ekundayo Rowe (Sierra Leone)

in the First Committee thematic debate on
Conventional weapons

16 October 2006

Madam Chair,

My delegation would like to make a few remarks about the most destructive weapons in the world today -- the so-called small arms and light weapons. I would like to start from where my colleague at the helm of the Programme of Action review process, Ambassador Kariyawasam of Sri Lanka, ended his statement last Thursday. He said that it was time we hear the words of the Secretary-General once again, that these weapons may be small, but they cause mass destruction. I share his view that time is running out and that we must commit once again to all action possible to stop the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons, now.

Some may ask 'Why now?' 'Why the rush, what's the urgency?' The answer is simple. Thousands of innocent people are being killed and maimed every day; thousands more are starving to death or languishing in refugee camps -- virtually all involving the illicit and uncontrolled circulation and use of small arms and light weapons.

Madam Chair, looking ahead and following the Review Conference, we must reassess our understanding of the humanitarian/human security implications of the problem. In this regard my delegation hopes that next year this Committee will hold a thematic debate jointly with the Third Committee on the humanitarian and human security aspects of illicit small arms and light weapons. Experts in the fields of humanitarian assistance, international humanitarian law, and health would be invited to contribute to the special debate. It is important for us to acknowledge that the proliferation of these weapons is first and foremost a serious, urgent and humanitarian/human security matter.

Secondly, we must reassess the global/international dimension of the problem and acknowledge the necessity of taking tough measures, especially at the international level under the aegis of the United Nations, to eradicate this scourge.

Today tough measures including punitive measures are being advocated to deal effectively with threats to international peace and security posed by nuclear weapons and other weapons described as weapons of mass destruction. However, one cannot understand why there is still reluctance, or even resistance on the part of some Member States to support tough legal measures at the international level to prevent, combat and eradicate the proliferation and use of illicit weapons, weapons that do not merely threaten

peace and security, but also incessantly cause mass destruction of human lives, particularly in Africa and other developing areas of the world.

Illicit activities that result in the massive destruction of innocent human life such as those directly related to small arms and light weapons, cannot be addressed by declarations and administrative measures alone. This is why we in the West African sub-region have gone beyond the Bamako Declaration of 2000, the Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Light Weapons as well as the Code of Conduct for the implementation of the Moratorium, to conclude a legally binding instrument on small arms and light weapons, their ammunition and related materials.

We believe that illicit activities must be counteracted effectively by strong legal regimes especially at the international level. We emphasize at the international level because there is still a tendency to underestimate the international nature of the problem, as well as the need for legally binding international instruments to complement national and regional efforts.

Madam Chair, we in the West African sub-region are delighted that less than six months after the signing of the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and other Related Materials, a process is about to begin here in this Committee towards a comprehensive legally binding international instrument for the import, export and transfer of conventional arms. Such an instrument when concluded should complement the ECOWAS and other existing regional and sub-regional regimes for responsible arms trade and transfer. My delegation is one of the co-sponsors of the draft resolution entitled "Toward an arms trade treaty: establishing common international standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional arms."

My delegation is pleased that some of those who did not support the overwhelming majority of States for a legally binding instrument on marking and tracing of small arms and light weapons, have now indicated that they would support a legally binding instrument on the arms trade. We hope that the others will soon follow, guided by the imperative that human security or the protection of innocent lives should be and remain at the heart of all national, regional and global efforts for responsible arms trade and transfer.

Thank you Madam Chair.
