



WFSA

The World Forum
on the Future of
Sport Shooting Activities

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Statement of Thomas Mason
Executive Secretary

World Forum on the Future of
Sport Shooting Activities

Madam Chairperson, let me begin by offering a special and sincere expression of our gratitude to you personally for your role in making possible these non-governmental organizations' presentations today. The World Forum on the Future of Sport Shooting Activities (WFSA) and its members find it notable and commendable that we and other NGOs will be heard.

I am the Executive Secretary for the Americas of the World Forum on the Future of Sport Shooting Activities. My European counterpart, Dott. Vito Genco of Italy, sends his regards, as does the President of the WFSA, Dott. Carlo Peroni, also of Italy.

The WFSA is an ECOSOC NGO with roster status. We have approximately 40 member associations who represent over 100 million hunters and sport shooters worldwide. Our members also represent most of the major firearms and ammunition manufacturers in the world. Further, Madam Chairperson, the WFSA as parent body since its inception 11 years ago has been present at every major UN meeting involving the subject of small arms and light weapons, and some of its individual member organizations have made UN appearances on related matters going back as far as 25 years. The WFSA proper has had close involvement with meetings on the UN Firearms Protocol, expert group meetings leading to the 2001 Conference, preparatory meetings for the 2001 Conference, the Group of Experts on Marking and Tracing, the Open Ended Working Group on Marking and Tracing, the 2003 and 2005 Biennial Review Conferences, the preparatory meeting for the 2006 Conference and the 2006 Conference itself.

Before the substance of my presentation I want again to emphasize the uniqueness of our perspective, and respectfully argue that our particular message deserves close attention. Although all NGOs are "equal", as it were, we would assert that through the technical expertise

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of its members (manufacturers and firearms owners), and its record of participation, the WFSA probably has more institutional memory and perspective on the question of small arms than any other body. We have not spent eleven years on these issues without learning a thing or two.

Madam Chairperson, the small arms and light weapons matter is not only complex, but it is, especially in this forum, a unique issue. Both of these conditions flow from the fact that according to the Swiss Small Arms Survey almost 60% of the small arms in the world are legally owned by civilians. Let me also add, Madam Chairperson, that we find this figure to reflect a commendable reality – these millions of legally-owned firearms are not the problem. They are used for hunting and wildlife management, for target shooting and other lawful purposes, or preserved as heritage artefacts. In fact, several studies show that, in the cultures examined, legally-owned firearms are an immediately available and effective deterrent to crime and violence.

The history of disarmament, prior to 1995, and properly so, was the history of reducing weapons stocks held by governments – let me repeat: governments. The 2001 Conference, the Programme of Action and all of those attendant efforts remain unique in that for the first time in history it was civilians and not governments that became the targets of the disarmament process.

In a way, this whole course of action had a rather Alice-in-Wonderland quality to it. In Alice's world, it was first the verdict, then the trial. In the world of the 2001 Conference and the PoA it was to have a disarmament conference but not really to include those whom you wish to disarm. Nevertheless, through the validity of our case and willingness to present only factual arguments, the hunting, sport shooting and firearms community has entered the arena and indeed has been to some extent heard.

We have consistently sought to have the UN focus its efforts by acknowledging the legitimacy of the civilian ownership of firearms. In his statement to the 2006 Conference, Dott. Carlo Peroni, President of the WFSA, said this:

The issue of legal civilian firearms possession should only play one role in this Conference, and that is for this body to acknowledge in its report the undeniable, legitimate and rightful role of hunting, sport shooting and lawful civilian firearms ownership in numerous UN member States.

We would again ask that this UN Conference adopt language reflecting this reality:

Recognizing that States have developed different cultural and historical uses for firearms, and that the purpose of the Programme of Action is not to discourage or diminish lawful ownership and use recognized by the Party States.

Unfortunately, Madam Chairperson, language to recognize the legitimacy of civilian ownership of firearms was never included in any of the proposed outcome documents. While Secretary-General Kofi Annan did speak of civilian firearms ownership at the commencement of the PoA conference, assuring us of the Conference's benign intent, the written word reflecting this position was never forthcoming.

Madam Chairperson, as members of the world community, the people represented by WFSA share the same desire to see an end to murder and other violence in the world's troublespots. It is vital to the efforts of the international community that its energies should not be wasted. There are certain kinds of fully-automatic war weapons, Madam Chairperson, which are cheaply manufactured and prone to anonymity of derivation. These are the universal choice of those wishing to make war on states or on civilian populations. If any firearms ought to be the focus of concerns of the international community, it is these military-style firearms. My organization deplores the wasted effort that surrounds misguided attempts at the limitation or prohibition of other, lawfully-held civilian firearms.

Now, Madam Chairperson, let me address the four general questions which you have posed to us.

First, as to the significance of the 2006 Small Arms Review Conference, Madam Chairperson, we believe that the real significance of the 2006 Conference – and you are really asking about the failure of the Conference – is it was there that the complexity and the uniqueness of the whole UN small arms process finally caught up with it. I have just discussed some of these factors.

There are those who attribute the failure of the 2006 Rev Con to political factors – indeed, politics always play a role in these matters – but one must go deeper. Governments do not take positions, strong positions, for cavalier reasons. One must ask why these positions were taken. Yes, they are political, in a broad sense, but there were real reasons for the failure in 2006. The issue of civilian possession and the prospect of an immensely impractical UN effort on ammunition were at least two of the issues which doomed the 2006 Conference.

Indeed, Madam Chairperson, one could argue that the 2006 Conference occurred in a vacuum, ignoring the wisdom of the people of the world. In October of 2005, the citizens of Brazil overwhelmingly rejected a ban on civilian possession of firearms. A ban, I might add, which was directly connected to UN small arms efforts and touted by those who support such efforts. Many NGOs and governments from that region ignored the results of the Brazilian referendum. Yet through their actions, the people spoke loudly and clearly in defence of their rights.

Let me return to the issue of what prevented consensus at the 2006 Conference. There are those who consider the mere existence of civilian-owned firearms to be part of the problem. They continue to maintain that in order to control "illicit firearms" the international community must control, or rather, in their view, reduce or eliminate legal firearms in the world. The issue of control of civilian possession of firearms, whether advocated by governments or NGOs, is

simply a non-starter. The controversy over other disputed issues, such as future conferences and ammunition, also reflected an underlying view that a conference which should have been an exercise in specifics, aimed at illicit arms, was really an attempt at introducing sweeping prohibitions on lawfully-owned firearms. Madam Chairperson, these are valuable and relevant lessons that we must learn if we are to move forward and successfully address the true problems.

A second question is presented as to the continuing implementation of the PoA. Madam Chairperson, when one reviews the numerous comments on the effectiveness of the PoA, one is struck by lack of what has been accomplished, and not by what has been done. We continue to be opposed to measures which unfairly affect legal ownership and use of firearms. We are also aware of the need to diminish illicit trafficking and use. To be very frank, the PoA has been used to support the former and has not been effective in reducing the latter.

We have always focused on solutions for the future. We believe that practical, science-based and non-ideological programs which focus on the real issues are the only intelligent option. A fight against illicit trafficking is not only compatible with our interests; it supports them. For example, efficient customs procedures should not only fight illicit trafficking in firearms, but should facilitate commerce in legal firearms.

Madam Chairperson, this brings us to the related question of more formal UN follow-up action regarding the PoA. This First Committee has already heard several calls for another Biennial Review Meeting in 2008. Building on the lessons of the past, it is imperative to future success that should there be further meetings on the PoA there must be a revisiting of the definition of "Small Arms". To have any hope of success this new definition must focus on fully-automatic weapons built to military specifications.

Madam Chairperson, this brings us to the final question you asked us to address, specifically our views on the proposed Group of Government Experts to examine the feasibility and scope of an arms trade treaty (ATT). WFSA does not endorse such a treaty or related process. We believe the concept, however well-intentioned, is fundamentally flawed. The PoA clearly demonstrated that issues related to SALW (as defined by the PoA) are too complex for a one-size-fits-all global effort. Regional efforts, on the other hand, have the highest potential for success. Yet another sweeping global initiative such as the ATT would be unwise and it threatens to waste time, energy and resources that could be used in pursuit of solutions with a higher chance of success. Alternatively, defining Small Arms as fully-automatic weapons built to military specifications would have the potential to focus the UN efforts and increase the likelihood of successful negotiations that would make a real difference.

However, even considering our organization's opposition to the ATT, if in fact such a group of experts is appointed, we would state with the strongest possible conviction: it must be expanded to include members of civil society, especially representatives of user groups and firearms manufacturers.

Madam Chairperson, when I discussed the failure of the 2006 Conference I said that the complexity of the issue had overtaken the process. I pointed out that well over half the small

arms in the world are legally owned by civilians, yet this was never really acknowledged. The UN should not make the same mistake twice – it should benefit from a hard-learned lesson.

If a global ATT process becomes one of business as usual, it will be subjected to the inconsistencies and contradictions which have adversely affected the PoA and the 2006 Conference. There must be involvement of all the legitimate stakeholders and this can start with the composition of the contemplated group of experts.

Let me add one further and important comment regarding any eventual ATT. We would implore you, your successors or the crafters of such an instrument not to make the same mistakes as were made with the UN Firearms Protocol. The Firearms Protocol not only exempts state-to-state transfers, but also contains an unconscionable exception to the general requirement that all firearms be marked with a serial number. It is our great fear that some future ATT will contain exceptions for so-called national security or the like, yet impose onerous burdens on the possession of and commerce in legal civilian firearms.

Madam Chairperson, I thank both you and the Committee for your indulgence. I should be happy to answer any questions.