
UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY 62ND SESSION
FIRST COMMITTEE
OCTOBER 26, 2007

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE
BOB BARR
WFSA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

WORLD FORUM ON THE FUTURE OF
SPORT SHOOTING ACTIVITIES



WFSA

The World Forum
on the Future of
Sport Shooting Activities

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Mr. Chairman, my name is Bob Barr and I am here representing the World Forum on the Future of Sport Shooting Activities (WFSA). This is the second year in which the WFSA has been asked to make a presentation to the First Committee. We once again appreciate the invitation and commend the body for the inclusion of NGOs in its deliberations.

The WFSA is an ECOSOC NGO with roster status. The organization and its approximately 40 member associations have appeared at nearly every meeting on small arms the UN has held since 1995. We are veterans of the UN Firearms Protocol, the 2001 Programme of Action, the marking and tracing effort, and the just-completed brokering effort. To paraphrase a noted statesman, we have not come all this way without learning a thing or two.

WFSA associations have a cumulative membership of over 100 million hunters and sport shooters. In addition, our associations represent nearly all the major firearms and ammunition manufacturers in the world.

I have spoken favorably of today's NGO participation and I should like to expand on that point with special reference to the WFSA. Mr. Chairman, the vast majority of the estimated 875 million small arms in the world, are owned by civilians. These hundreds of millions -- and it is hundreds of millions -- of law-abiding hunters, sport shooters, collectors

and other firearms owners are the people for who the WFSA speaks. My comments today will focus on the proposed Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) process envisioned by Resolution 61/89, and the soon-to-be appointed group of government experts, or GGE, on ammunition under Resolution 61/72.

Mr. Chairman, I will become more specific as regards both of these issues, but I should initially like to point out that as presently conceived, civilian firearms owners and civilian ammunition manufacturers are more at risk than any of other groups to be impacted by the results of these effort.

The ATT

Mr. Chairman, the WFSA has had the benefit of reviewing close to one hundred government and NGO submissions and statements submitted under the consultation process envisioned by Resolution 61/89. The ATT has been referred to positively in numerous interventions during this present First Committee session. Notwithstanding this apparent surface support, it would benefit us all to take and retain a realistic view of the ATT process.

The WFSA believes that, apart from shared concerns regarding the wrongful use of small arms (criminal use, oppressive government action, terrorist acts, etc.), the ATT effort remains at this point inappropriately broad, unfocused, nebulous and inconsistent.

Numerous parties have made statements to the effect that an eventual ATT would somehow prohibit transfers of arms which would facilitate "bad" acts such as those noted above. The same parties have acknowledged the right of states to manufacture and transfer arms for legitimate purposes. How these two positions are to be reconciled has not been addressed in even a threshold manner. Failure to resolve this contradiction will continue to present an insurmountable problem from the standpoint of the WFSA. It will also militate against any hope for success in curbing wrongful use. A Treaty that is no more than an exercise in "gesture politics" would be a wasted opportunity; a result that would be in no one's interests.

In addition, the WFSA finds that many groups (NGOs) with a simplistic, anti-firearms domestic political agenda essentially view "gun control" for its own sake, and take no recognition of the wide range of lawful and

legitimate uses to which firearms are put in the civilian context. These groups have adopted the ATT as a vehicle for their political agendas. If the ATT is perceived -- as it is already coming to be even at this early stage -- as part of a means to further such domestic political agendas, it will present the same fundamental and insurmountable problems as the Programme of Action before it. This would represent a decidedly anti-firearms agenda the WFSA could not accept.

As in the past, of course, the WFSA is committed to engaging in a positive dialog and exercise, to affirm and represent the interests of legitimate civilian users of firearms with arguments that are intellectually robust and based on sound evidence.

Mr. Chairman, despite assurances and rhetoric to the contrary, civilian firearms are *still* included within ATT efforts. This is evident from a reading of the documents themselves, as well as from numerous government and NGO statements.

Legal civilian firearms should *not* be within the scope of the ATT; and until this exclusion is unequivocally and clearly implanted, we must oppose the current effort.

We are pleased to note, however, the proceedings of the conference entitled, 'AN INTERNATIONAL ARMS TRADE TREATY: BUILDING CONSENSUS AND MAKING IT WORK', held at the Royal College of Defense Studies, Seaford House, London, on 5th June 2007. Paragraph 15 of that document provides, in part:

“In certain states the ATT might receive more support if it were presented as an international effort to stop arms from entering the *illicit* market (rather than a UN-sponsored disarmament initiative), and if it were also to be made clear that the ATT would *not* be concerned with legitimate domestic ownership of firearms by civilians” (emphasis added).

This widely-accepted formulation represents a realistic and positive step towards productive understanding, and is welcome. To gain support, however, an ATT would not only need to eschew absolutely any concern with domestic laws, regulations and legislation, but also guarantee both the legitimate international commerce in, and movement of, civilian

arms and the right of individual private civilian owners of firearms to transport them internationally for legitimate purposes.

The WFSA also should call attention to the undesirability of the creation of a new UN bureaucracy.

Mr. Chairman, we are all aware that a GGE on the proposed ATT will soon begin its work. The WFSA is concerned that the ATT GGE will not be representative of that previously mentioned group which could be most affected by any eventual treaty – the hundreds of millions of law abiding civilian firearms owners. We cannot have confidence that the legitimate rights, interests and views of these many civilians will be properly represented in the process, unless and until there is a formal mechanism for them to register their concerns and ensure their inclusion. Governments and “government experts” will be primarily interested in protecting and promoting the interests of governments (including maximum control of firearms), *not* of civilian citizens or the industry.

For these and other reasons, the WFSA must register both its objections to the ATT at the present juncture and its resolute intention to protect the interests of the legitimate civilian users of firearms and the industry which supplies their needs.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, let me conclude by return to something I said originally and that was my favorable comment on NGO participation in this process, and the unique view that the particular organization I represent presents today. Some would consider our views, which we reiterate here today, in some sense negative. This is not so. While WFSA has been critical of the movement for the ATT, we would ask you today, our fellow NGOs and the various policy makers who will consider these questions at length and over time, to view our comments as points positively offered, and as an important part of a very necessary dialog. As I said Mr. Chairman, we will continue to defend our rights and our positions. Consistent with that, we will offer our assistance, our expertise; and our good will regarding all of these important matters. We hope others will take a similarly objective and sincere approach. Thank you.