

STATEMENT
by
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Republic of Mauritius**
at the
**United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade In Small Arms
and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects**
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New York

Mr President,

Allow me, first of all, to congratulate Ambassador Reyes of Colombia on his election as President of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons. My delegation is also pleased to see you, Ambassador Donowaki, presiding over in a very skillful manner the High-level Segment of the Conference.

I would also wish to join previous speakers in expressing my gratitude to Ambassador Carlos dos Santos of Mozambique for his excellent work and the leadership he has shown during the three sessions of the Preparatory Committee of this Conference.

Mr President,

It is indeed distressing that the world community has had to wait until July 2001 to focus on the ravages caused by the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. This undeniably has been the source and cause of carnage and unspeakable tragedies in many parts of the world. Since the end of the Cold War and even before, Africa has been, and continues to be, the continent where the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons is fuelling the conflicts which remain a major impediment to sustainable development. At the recent OAU Summit held in Lusaka, Zambia, the Heads of State and Government considered this issue and they have addressed a message to this Conference. This message inter alia welcomes the convening of the Conference with a view to adopting the Programme of Action that would particularly -

- (a) ensure a more effective arms control in Africa,
- (b) focus on prevention of illicit trafficking,
- (c) strengthen export control measures,
- (d) reduce arms surplus and
- (e) monitor existing stocks.

The Summit has also appealed to the international community to provide all necessary financial and technical assistance for the implementation of the Programme of Action. Africa is in desperate need of such assistance. This message is consonant with the Bamako Declaration. My delegation is glad to see that several recommendations of the Bamako Declaration are reflected in the document L4 Rev.1 currently under consideration by our experts. My delegation hopes that the ECOWAS moratorium banning the importation and manufacture of small arms and light weapons will be renewed and will become permanent.

Mr President,

The adoption of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction was a milestone in international cooperation. The time has come to build on it and to work on a convention that would regulate trade in small arms and light weapons. The need for this becomes even more telling when we look at the statistics. They are appalling. More than 500 million small arms and light weapons are in circulation globally, of which 40 to 50 percent are illegal. Gun makers have grown from about 200 in 1980 to 600 today in 95 countries. Over the past ten years, small arms and light

weapons have claimed around four million lives of which almost two million were children. These weapons are used to kill at least half a million people each year mainly in the Great Lakes region, Angola, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka. They are used indiscriminately and the civilians are the casualties most of the time.

The trafficking thrives on the greed and inhumanity of a category of persons for whom the only thing that counts is money or blood diamonds. The Conference must examine ways and means of taking action against them and countries must enact legislation to provide for heavy penalties as well as confiscation of their unexplained assets and those of their relatives.

Mr President,

Small arms and light weapons very often are in the possession of the mafia, armed gangs that go about their criminal activities endangering the law and order situation. Whether they are rebel groups, warlords or terrorists, they have all created havoc worldwide by using small arms and light weapons. Small and vulnerable States are more exposed to this scourge. Last year, the legitimate Government of Fiji was held hostage by a small group of individuals with the result that the constitutional order was disrupted. This group did not need heavy military equipment to perpetrate their actions. Small arms and light weapons were more than adequate.

Mr President,

The easy availability of small arms and light weapons coupled with the decimation of the male adult population in many African countries as a result of HIV/AIDS and casualties

resulting from conflicts, has seen an increasingly large number of young children bearing these weapons. No country can remain insensitive to the future of these children and for the sake of international peace and security we need to act now to stop this dangerous trend.

Mr President,

African countries continue to be plagued by an increasing number of intra and inter-state armed conflicts which have resulted in catastrophic social and economic consequences. These conflicts are fuelled and sustained by small arms and light weapons. The legal acquisition of arms in Africa has significantly dropped over the past years, but this has not, in the least, reduced the number of such weapons in circulation there. Most of these are acquired illegally and they are essential for the pursuit of hostilities. Even if conflicts started for political reasons, it is evident today that plunder and looting seem to be the reasons for their continuation.

Over the past months, several Expert panel reports have exposed the nexus between the illegal exploitation of natural resources in Africa and the acquisition of weapons through illegal means and paid for by blood diamonds and other precious metals.

Mr President,

Illicit trafficking needs the intervention of a wide range of intermediaries who are known to the intelligence services of the major powers. Such intelligence must be made available to all the countries directly affected by the illicit trafficking. Aircraft that is used for the transport must travel through the airspace of countries and the non-vigilance and non-inspection of documents and cargo of suspect aircraft during technical stopovers by the authorities of these countries amount to grave omissions which inevitably result in loss of thousands of innocent lives.

Mr President,

My delegation considers that the problems of illicit trade in small arms and light weapons need to be addressed in a comprehensive manner at national, regional and global levels. We fully support the recommendations contained in the Draft Programme of Action which appears in document L4 Rev. 1 in particular the following measures to which my delegation attaches great importance:

States should undertake measures to combat the illegal trade and tighten control over the legal trade in small arms and light weapons. Domestic regulations should be strengthened as part of an international strategy to reduce illicit trafficking and misuse of small arms and light weapons. States not having the necessary expertise and means should be able to obtain the assistance of the international community in the strengthening of their national legislation. Governments need to implement measures to regulate the civilian access and possession of small arms and light weapons States should also carefully monitor the activities of arms brokers, many of whom tend to be directly involved in the violations of

arms embargoes. Furthermore, the activities of transportation agents should also be strictly regulated since many of them have also been conniving with unscrupulous arm dealers.

It is very important to enact legislations to make it mandatory for arms manufacturers to apply indelible markings on small arms and light weapons during the production process to ensure that their origin can be easily traced.

States should enact the necessary legislation to track banking transactions and movement of funds of suspected traffickers in small arms and light weapons.

Mr President,

My delegation supports the stand of the European Union on the necessity for countries that are manufacturers to supply all relevant and necessary information and to make transparent all their legal transactions in small arms and light weapons. We would like to propose that the LTN Secretariat studies the setting up of an Open Register where every buyer and seller would be required to submit all details of their transactions in arms. Such a Register would form the basis of an Annual Report.

Mauritius welcomes the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly last May of the legally binding Protocol against the Illicit Manufacture of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunitions, supplementing the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crimes. This is indeed a very important step in the right direction.

We also wish to inform the Conference that the SADC Draft Protocol on Firearms, Ammunition and Other Related Materials is being finalized and will be open for signature at the SADC Summit next month.

Mr President,

My delegation considers the Draft Programme of Action contained in document L4 Rev1 to be balanced with a well-defined approach to combat the illicit manufacture of and trafficking in small arms and light weapons at all levels. Like other delegations, we hope that at the end of the Conference, the document will be adopted without major amendments. Although we fully understand the domestic and constitutional concerns of some countries, yet we also firmly believe collective international efforts are the only way to achieve a degree of success in fighting this scourge.

If at the end of this Conference agreement is reached on measures that would effectively curb the illicit proliferation and trafficking in small arms and light weapons, we would be sending a much needed positive signal to the world and to Africa in particular.

Mr President,

It is the hope of my delegation that this Conference will pave the way for an eventual finalizing of an international instrument which is effective, pragmatic and comprehensive

in the collection and elimination of all unauthorized and surplus small arms and light weapons from all the conflict areas around the globe. These small arms and light weapons are small and light only in name but they have the capability of being arms and weapons of mass destruction.

For this and other reasons, we need to starve the conflicts by denying them the small arms, launch rockets and light weapons as well as ammunition. Without these no rebel and no warlord, however determined, will be able to terrorise, to maim and to kill. We can achieve this by declaring that any person who engages in illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons commits a crime against humanity.

We in Africa look to the day when there will be no conflicts and we start preparing for the post-conflict reconstruction and development. We need the support of the international community to achieve this. This is why we attach immense importance to the deliberations of this Conference.

I thank you for your attention.