

Statement by
H.E Mr Jagdish Koonjul
Permanent Representative of the
Republic of Mauritius to the United Nations
At the
Security Council Open Debate
On
Small Arms
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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 leadership he has shown during the three sessions of the Preparatory Committee of this Conference.

Mr President,

In his Millennium Report, the Secretary-General rightly described small arms as “weapons of mass destruction” in terms of their widespread devastating effects and potentials. My delegation fully subscribes to this assessment. Although, small arms have made more victims than chemical, biological or nuclear weapons, yet there exists no mechanism to limit the proliferation of small arms and light weapons as it is the case for weapons of mass destruction. It is in this perspective that my delegation views the holding of this Conference as very opportune. We must seize the opportunity of this Conference, to gear all our efforts in the tackling of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in a most effective manner.

The ready availability and easy manipulation of small arms and light weapons have made them the “weapons of choice” in almost all major conflicts since 1990. More than 500 million of small arms and light weapons are in circulation globally. However, the truth remains that the major victims of these conflicts have been civilian children and women. It is totally

unacceptable for my delegation that small arms and light weapons which were initially design to protect, should put in peril the lives of men and women.

Mr President,

It is well known that two million children have been killed in the last ten years in conflicts where small arms have been used. Furthermore, an increasingly large number of innocent children are being forced to become child soldiers in a growing number of conflicts. We need to act in a very speedy and decisive manner to put an end to this practice. No region, no country is in fact immune from the effects of arms proliferation. Although 50 to 60 per cent of the global trade in small arms is legal, however, several factors such as intrastate conflicts, ethnic and civil wars, terrorist activities, drug trafficking and money laundering have diverted small arms and light weapons into the illegal channels.

Mr President,

The issue of small arms and light weapons has fortunately not attained an alarming state in Mauritius. Yet, Mauritius remains mindful of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in a large number of countries, particularly in Africa.

Mr President,

Coming from the African region, I would fail in my duty if I do not highlight the problems faced by the continent. Africa continues to be plagued with an increasing number of intra and inter-state armed conflicts, largely fuelled by the easy availability of the small arms and light weapons. However, the paradox remains that Africa continues to be a net importer rather than a producer of weapons. The legal acquisition of arms in Africa has significantly dropped over the past years. However, there has been simultaneously an increase in the illicit flow of arms to the continent. Many of the armed conflicts are clearly driven more by greed for wealth and power rather than a quest for peace and the welfare of the people. In many cases, the conflicts continue to remain profitable to a few individuals whose interests lie in exercising control over the natural resources of their countries.

Over the past months, several Expert panel reports have exposed the nexus between the illegal exploitation of natural resources in Africa and the need to acquire weapons through illegal means to sustain military activities and conflicts by rebel groups. The problems of blood diamond in Africa is known to all of us and the situation in Sierra Leone, Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo speak for themselves.

Mr President,

We need to effectively address the African agenda for peace. In this regard, my delegation considers that weapon producing countries have the primary responsibility to ensure that measures are taken to discourage arms flows to African countries engaged in armed conflicts or which have emerged from them. Unless such actions are taken, all our efforts to control and resolve conflicts in Africa, will remain futile, ineffective and incomplete.

Mr President,

My delegation is convinced that in addressing the problems associated with illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in a comprehensive manner, we should imperatively deal with the issue at the national, regional and global levels.

We consider the followings to be important steps that need to be taken by national governments:

- States should undertake measures to combat both the illegal trade as well as tighten control over the legal trade in small arms.
- Domestic regulations should be strengthened as part of an international strategy to reduce illicit trafficking and misuse of small arms and light weapons. In this regard, it is crucial to have concerted actions and coordination involving the local police, customs services and the judiciary. States not having the necessary expertise and means should be able to enlist the assistance of the international community in the strengthening of their national legislations.
- Governments need to implement measures to regulate the civilian access and possession of small arms and light weapons
- The activities of arms brokers should be carefully monitored by States because in various instances, arm brokers have been directly involved in the violations of arms embargoes.
- Furthermore, the activities of transportation agents should also be carefully regulated since many of these agents have also been conniving with unscrupulous arm brokers.
- States should 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.

Mr President,

Some Individual States like Albania, Niger and Mozambique have successfully undertaken measures for the collection and destruction of both illicit and surplus arms. However, we would wish to see more countries undertaking similar actions.

At the African level, there is the political will to fight the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. African Ministers met in Mali last year to adopt the Bamako Declaration which enshrines the common African position on the illicit proliferation, circulation and trafficking of small arms and light weapons. My delegation is glad to see that several of the recommendations from the Bamako Declaration are reflected in the document L4 Rev1 currently under consideration by our experts. In the same stride the ECOWAS moratorium banning the importation and manufacture of light weapons in ECOWAS Member States is a welcome initiative. However, it is more important today that we render such moratorium more effective.

Mr President,

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.

Mr President,

My delegation considers the Draft Programme of Action contained in document L4/Rev1 to be well 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 by consensus without major amendments. Furthermore, we favour the establishment of any sort of mechanism that would ensure the follow-up of the measures that we would agree upon during the Conference.

Let me address a few words to the representatives of non-governmental organizations present in the room. Friends, you have been playing a very important role in the fight against the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. My delegation commends you for your continued support in creating a global awareness on the worldwide devastation caused by small arms and light weapons. You have been successfully carrying your agenda across the world yet in the process you will surely face several challenges. To you, I have in mind a famous quotation from Albert Schweitzer “Life becomes harder for us when we live for others, but it also becomes richer and happier”. I wish you all the best in your endeavour.

Thank you Mr President.