

**Launching of the book intitled « Armed and Aimless : Armed groups, guns and human security in the ECOWAS region »**

Remarks presented by  
**H.E.M. Cheick Sidi Diarra**  
Ambassador, Permanent Representative  
of Mali to the United Nations

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**New York, July 13, 2005**

## **Excellencies,**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, let me thank the organizers of this side event for the launching of the book intitled « *Armed and aimless : Armed groups, guns, and human security in the ECOWAS region* » commissioned by the Human Security Network.

My special thanks to H.E.M. Johan Lovald, Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations.

I congratulate Small Arms Survey for carrying out such an important work on a subject which is of a major concern in our region, namely West Africa.

I am quite sure that this book will be of a great contribution to the understanding of the over all question of armed groups, illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons and their links with the issue of human security.

Both Norway and Mali happen to be members of Human security Network which has adopted under the able leadership of Austria, in Gratz in 2003 the issues of children in armed conflits and illegal proliferation of SALW as two of its top priorities in the Plan of action for 2003-2005 term.

It has done so because the 13 members of HSN believe in <<freedom from fear>> as a prerequisite to any form of human security. In absence of rule of law, it is difficult to pretend to live in dignity. And when you have as much as 8 million of SALW in the region out of the control of any kind of structured and legal institutions, but in the hands of armed groups, then one can understand the scoop of hardship the population are facing in their daily lives. They strive for the most fundamental of rights : the right to live in security. In some countries, populations are affected directly by war, and in countries spared by war, the major factor is transborder smuggling of SAWL.

Most of the time, the armed groups act without any political aspiration. Either they are controlled by Warlords in order to conquer political power or to get control over a source of wealth. Or they act in small autonomous groups. They exert racketeering and extortion. In any of these cases, they are dangerous.

That is why we support endeavor of countries of the region and also that of interational Community to help curb the proliferation of SALW in West Africa.

In that context I would like to make a special mention to the initiative by Norway, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom aimed at subjecting arms brokering to adequate regulations.

Let me also make a special reference to the Memorandum of understanding between the Group of Wassenaar and ECOWAS which has set up a framework for the implementation of the Moratorium on SALW.

ECOWAS itself has adopted a Moratorium in 1998 on import and export and making of small arms in West Africa. That instrument has been a political measure by which Governments of the Region committed themselves to combat illicit proliferation of SALW. Since then, the Moratorim has been renewed on a regular basis.

A process has been launched to transform the Moratorium into a binding legal instrument before the end of 2005. This initiative is called <<Program to combat small arms>>

To that effect, a Small Arms Unit have been established as a part of the Secretariat of the Organization.

ECOWAS has also supported the establishment of National Commissions to combat illicit proliferation of SALW in almost all the countries of the region.

Countries in the region have taken measures at national level to reform their laws in order to harmonise them with their regional and international commitments.

There has been a longstanding support of the United Nations to ECOWAS in combatting illicit proliferation of SALW. During the last 15 years many conflicts have occured in West Africa. Most of the situations the UN Security Council is dealing with to preserve international peace and security, are located in this part of Africa. As a result, many crossborder issues were addressed.

In his report **S/2003/1217** of 31 December 2003, the Secretary General of the United Nations made a series of 12 recommendations aimed at tackling the question of SALW. He has proposed among other things :

- the negotiation of a binding international instrument on marking and tracing SALW ;
- the strengthening of interaction between Security Council and General Assembly in order to set up a long term strategy to address the issue ;
- the strict implementation of sanctions, including embargos on arms under Chapter VII of the Charter if necessary, and the adoption of sanctions against countries that violate embargos ;
- conduct a study aimed at establishing the link between illicit trade of small arms and illicit exploitation of natural resources ;
- the inclusion in the mandate of Peace keeping operations of the gathering of SALW ;
- allocation of more resources to the DDR programs, in particular the Reinsertion aspect of it ;
- establishment of authentic certificate of final user ;
- public denonciation of individuals, compagnies, groups and countries involved in violation of arms embargos ;

In his <<reports on ways to combat subregional and cross-border problems in West Africa>> published in 2004 (**S/2004/200**) and 2005 (**S/2005/86**), Secretary general made similar recommandations based on a regional approach. Thus, the United Nations Office for West Africa has agreed upon a program of work with ECOWAS and European Union in order to implement some of the recommendations. This type of triangular cooperation should be encouraged.

I cannot do without underlying the important role to be played by SALW producers in these efforts to combat the illicit proliferation of these arms. In this regard, non-state actors should not be given the opportunity to have access to these deadly weapons.

In conclusion, I believe that none of the efforts will bear fruits if the root causes of conflicts are not addressed, namely : poverty, unemployment of the youth, deprivation, bad governance, human rights violations...

The success of our common endeavor depends also on the sensitization of population. Civil society organizations and media organizations have their share in that process.

I thank you.