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STATEMENT

BY

AMBASSADOR B. O. OWOSENI
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
PERMANENT MISSION OF NIGERIA TO THE UN
VIENNA

ON

CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS

AT THE

FIRST COMMITTEE OF THE 59TH SESSION
OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

NEW YORK, 21 OCTOBER 2004
Mr. Chairman,

The problem of illicit trade in small arms and light weapons is of particular concern to Nigeria as it constitutes a major impediment to peace, stability, security and economic development of many developing countries. These arms continue to have devastating consequences on the African continent considering their capacity to fuel, intensify and prolong conflicts. I need not mention the destruction, in catastrophic proportions, of economic and social infrastructure in the affected countries resulting from the illicit use of these weapons.

As conflicts get prolonged, the need for more arms grows, thus perpetuating the vicious cycle. This is simply because small arms and light weapons are the weapons of choice in most conflict situations. It is estimated that there are about 650 million small arms in the world today. About 500,000 people die each year from their use. Of the estimated 4 million war-related deaths during the 1990s, 90 per cent of those killed were civilians, and 80 per cent of that number were women and children, mostly victims of the misuse of small arms and light weapons. The proliferation of these weapons has also hindered global humanitarian efforts and exacerbated the phenomenon of child soldiers.

Africa remains the continent most affected by the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons. For this reason, the Nigerian delegation welcomes all efforts by the international community to address this problem. In this regard, we wish to re-emphasise the importance of early and full implementation of the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects. Nigeria recognizes the spirit behind the adoption of this document and believes that it will continue to serve as a guide in our cooperative efforts in tackling illicit proliferation of small arms. My delegation also reaffirms its commitment to the Bamako Ministerial Declaration of November 2000 containing African Common Position on the Illicit Proliferation, Circulation and Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons. The positions expressed in the Declaration remain as valid today as they were in 2000 when it was adopted.

In this regard, we view as positive development the recent convening of the first substantive session of the Open Ended Working Group to identify and trace illicit small arms and light weapons in a timely and reliable manner. The most crucial issue that this Working Group should resolve now is the issue of the nature of the instrument itself. Considering the extent of devastation that illicit small arms and light weapons have continued to cause globally especially in the African region and the urgent need to curb the menace, it is imperative that the instrument to be negotiated should further advance the political commitments already expressed in the Programme of Action to a higher level.

The proposed instrument should address the problem of tracing illicit small arms and light weapons in a more fundamental way. It is, therefore, essential that such instrument is legally binding for effective implementation. It is our belief that the success of the Working Group on Tracing will have positive impact on the forthcoming Second
Mr. Chairman,

In Africa, one of the greatest difficulties in controlling illicit proliferation of small arms is the fact of their easy accessibility to non-State actors. Consistent call on the international community, particularly arms producing and supplying countries, to limit trade in small arms and light weapons to governments and registered licensed traders has been largely ignored. This matter was underscored in the Bamako Declaration. It is worthy of note that the failure of the international community to hold arms manufacturers, their agents and brokers to account has been largely responsible for the uncontrolled illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Africa, with its attendant consequences on the continent.

It is common knowledge that one of the most effective strategies for dealing with the problem of illicit small arms trade is to control it from source. Many countries, particularly in Africa, are ill-equipped to counter the massive flow of illicit arms into their territories from manufacturers and suppliers especially in situations where there are willing partners in form of rebel groups. The international community should, therefore, agree on imposition of appropriate sanctions on arms manufacturers and suppliers who divert their arms exports to illicit networks. The existence of this practice further reinforces the argument for a legally binding instrument on tracing these weapons.

The cooperation of the international community is also needed to intensify efforts in investigating and identifying the link between illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and the illicit exploitation of natural and other resources, particularly those of some countries in Africa. It is common knowledge that proceeds from illegal exploitation of Africa’s natural resources are sometimes channeled into funding illicit arms trade in the continent. We encourage the application of appropriate sanctions to any individual, company, government or non-State actor that may be found to be involved in this practice.

Many African States have undertaken various initiatives at different levels to address the common challenge of illicit small arms trade. These efforts are made out of deep concern over the devastating effects of the illicit trade in small and light weapons on peace, security, stability and sustainable development in the continent. Unfortunately, Africa has recorded little achievement in controlling this illicit trade in concrete terms since the UN Conference on the subject in 2001. Rather, the continent has witnessed continued proliferation of these weapons resulting in some cases to greater problems of political instability and armed conflict.

This regrettable situation may be due in part to lack of means to meet the overwhelming challenge. But by far the greatest difficulty encountered by African countries is that of lack of international cooperation particularly from arms suppliers and manufacturers who maintain the continued influx of illicit small arms into region. There
is need for the international community, as represented in this Committee, to seriously address this aspect of the problem.

Mr. Chairman,

Illicit trade in small arms has always obstructed the implementation of arms embargoes imposed by the Security Council. The establishment of independent panel of experts and monitoring mechanisms by the Council to promote compliance with arms embargoes is a welcome development. However, while this measure may be useful in controlling the illegal cross-border movement of small arms into conflict areas, it is ineffective in controlling and eliminating those arms that are already inside the areas of conflict. We, therefore, emphasise the need for effective DDR programmes which should normally include weapons collection, storage and destruction.

Experience has shown that the failure of DDR programmes in many post-conflict situations is due principally to non inclusion of such programmes in cease-fire agreements and in the mandates and budgets for UN peacekeeping operations. DDR programmes as well as programmes for weapons collection, storage and destruction that rely entirely on extra-budgetary resources or voluntary contributions for their implementation often suffer disappointing failure, resulting in some cases to re-ignition of armed conflict and consequently to increased demand for illicit small arms. It is, nevertheless, acknowledged that the collapse of DDR programmes could, to some extent, be attributable to the failure of the international community to provide adequate financial assistance to countries emerging from conflict. But a secure funding basis from assessed budget for peacekeeping would ensure the return of ex-combatants to their communities under planned reintegration activities as required by Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000). Nigeria, therefore, wishes once again, to urge the international community to recognise the crucial importance of incorporating DDR programmes in cease-fire agreements as well as in the mandates and budgets for UN peacekeeping operations.

In addressing the threat posed by illicit small arms trafficking, there is need for cooperative relationship between the DPKO and DDA, that is, the Security Council and the General Assembly. While the Security Council has responsibility for peacekeeping operations and arms embargoes as well as other political measures relating countries in conflict, the DDA is seized with practical disarmament measures including responsibility for regional centres for peace and disarmament. The two Departments have interest in weapons collection and destruction in post-conflict areas. We appreciate the role of Coordinating Action Small Arms (CASA) within the UN system. However, a greater integral approach involving the DPKO and DDA is absolutely essential for success in post-conflict peace-building initiatives.

Mr. Chairman,

Nigeria, on its part, remains committed to the fight against illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons and had over the years taken steps and major initiatives in that direction. In 2001, Nigeria joined other Member countries of ECOWAS in renewing, for
a second three-year period, the Moratorium on the importation, exportation and manufacturing of small arms and light weapons in West Africa.

On 7 May 2001, two months prior to the UN Small Arms Conference, the Federal Government established the Nigerian National Committee on Small Arms and Light Weapons which maintains a strong permanent relationship with ECOWAS Executive Secretariat in implementing the Moratorium. Nigeria has been steadfast in her respect for the Moratorium. With the establishment of the National Committee we now have a national arms register and database. The Committee has also organized several training workshops and seminars for stakeholders on the issue of small arms.

Nigeria operates a strict firearms regime as a further proof of her determination to keep these weapons out of circulation in the country. By Nigeria’s Firearms Control Act, possession or acquisition of firearms for personal use requires approval from the highest authority. This effort is extended to the borders. In a three-phase training programme support provided by the United States Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), Nigeria has trained over 200 border security personnel on modern methods of interdicting concealments by traffickers and smugglers.

In November 2003, Nigeria initiated and hosted the First Tripartite Seminar on Enhanced Border Control and Security with her neighbouring States of Benin and Niger Republics involving the border operatives of the three countries. The Federal Executive Council has approved the Communique that emerged from the Seminar for implementation. Through regular joint border patrol with her neighbours, Nigeria has continued the effort to keep track of the influx of illicit small arms into country, and had sometimes succeeded in arresting and prosecuting trans-border traffickers. Nigeria cooperates with the police from other West African countries in tracing the movement of illicit arms across borders through the Interpol Bureau in West Africa in which she has strong representation.

As a country that cherishes an international environment governed by peace and security, Nigeria has spent more than $10 billion in the last 15 years in different efforts to stem the tide of recurrent conflicts in the West Africa, caused by illicit circulation in the sub-region of an estimated 8 million small arms and light weapons. In addition to this, thousands of Nigerian soldiers and civilians have lost their lives in this peacekeeping endeavour in the affected countries. Nigeria continues to provide sanctuary to refugees fleeing from some of these conflicts at enormous financial cost to the Federal Government.

Nigeria’s unrelenting fight against illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons was further advanced during the second quarter of this year with the recovery and confiscation of 2,564 illegal firearms and 118,574 assorted ammunitions. Of the above, 1065 assorted small arms and 953 recovered ammunitions were publicly destroyed on 24 May 2004 while 1139 illicit firearms and 1474 ammunitions were destroyed on 2nd September 2004. Earlier this year, a three-day ECOWAS Conference on Combating Illicit Small Arms Brokering and Trafficking was held in Nigeria’s capital, Abuja, from
22 to 24 March, under the sponsorship of the governments of the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom. The Conference was successful in sensitizing ECOWAS Member States on the problem of illicit brokering and helped in developing common understanding on ways to address the problem, including sub-regional coordination mechanisms.

Recently, Nigeria initiated moves for cooperative activities with DDA regarding a national action plan as well as on capacity building through training of arms-related security operatives. It is our hope that these nascent proposals will materialize in full.

Mr. Chairman,

While we underline the importance of practical measures to eliminate threat of illicit small arms, Nigeria has always believed in conflict prevention measures and pursuit of negotiated solution to conflicts as most effective means of minimizing the demand for illicit small arms. The international community should pay particular attention to the need for adoption of these measures as best strategies for peace. Connected to this is the need for the creation of good political atmosphere that will enhance harmonious relationship at national and international level, and a sense of belonging. Emphasis in this regard should be on promoting structures and processes that strengthen democracy, human rights, rule of law and good governance as well as economic recovery and growth as means of eliminating conflicts and guaranteeing durable peace. This is in consonance with the spirit of NEPAD and the Constitutive Act of the African Union. It is recognized that lack of international support for development efforts from States in a position to do so, and the crushing debt burden, continue to constitute major obstacle to the achievement of these lofty objectives. This notwithstanding, the Nigerian delegation wishes to urge all nations to be guided by the principle of pacific settlement of disputes as enshrined in the UN Charter as the most enduring solution to illicit small arms problem.

Mr. Chairman,

I cannot conclude this statement without reference to the forthcoming First Review Conference of the Ottawa Convention on landmines, known as the Nairobi Summit for a Mine Free World, to be held in Nairobi from 29 November to 3 December this year. The Review Conference represents an excellent opportunity not only to evaluate the progress that has been made in the last five years in its implementation but also to chart the course for complete eradication of the weapon by the second Review Conference in 2009. In consideration of this fact, we call upon all States Parties to attend the Conference at the highest possible level. As a State Party to the Convention, Nigeria has complied with the obligations she assumed under the instrument, in particular by rendering her transparency report as stipulated under Article 7. We endorse the Ministerial Declaration adopted here in New York on 23 September 2004 containing African Common Position on the issue of anti-personnel landmines.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.