PERMANENT MISSION OF NIGERIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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STATEMENT

BY

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PERMANENT MISSION OF NIGERIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

AT THE

THEMATIC DEBATE OF THE FIRST COMMITTEE OF THE 63RD SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

ON CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS

NEW YORK, OCTOBER 21, 2008
Mr. Chairman,

Our intervention under this cluster 'Conventional Weapons' will be focused on Small Arms and Light Weapons, an issue that is of utmost importance to my delegation.

Mr. Chairman,

For my delegation, the time is right for a renewed interactive engagement geared towards comprehensive regulation and elimination of illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons as they contribute to the escalation of global military expenditure. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), world military expenditure has risen to one point three trillion United States dollars (US$1.34 trillion). It is also a well known fact that three billion people or half of the world's population live on less than two and half dollars a day. These no doubt, are a further demonstration that global production and sales of weapons have continued to ignore the grave political, humanitarian and strategic realities and consequences of the escalation of arms production. It also ignores the nexus between disarmament and development.

It was this consideration that led the 1978 Special Session On Disarmament (SSODI) to refer to such spending as 'Colossal Waste of Resources'. It therefore called for the reduction in military spending, with the hope that such cuts would be reinvested in efforts at fighting hunger, poverty and improving human condition. The current global financial crisis portends further complication and aggravation of the socio-economic conditions of developing countries. It is in this regard that my delegation believes that the more we ignore these realities, the more this August body risks losing its responsibility of being the 'Conscience of Man'.

We are agreed that it is the legitimate and fundamental right of sovereign states to produce and procure arms for legitimate national defence and security needs. It is however imperative that such arms be controlled to prevent their diversion from states and licensed traders to non-state actors and illicit end-users. We recall that when the 2005 resolution on international instrument on tracing of illicit SALW was adopted, Nigeria expressed its desire to see that the politically binding instrument be transformed into a universal and legally binding one that would make our world a safer place for all.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation was therefore gratified by resolution 61/89 of December 2006, titled "Towards an Arms Trade Treaty," when the General Assembly requested the Secretary General to set up the Group of Governmental Experts, to seek the views of Member States on the feasibility, scope and draft parameters for a Comprehensive, Legally Binding Instrument Establishing Common International Standards for the Import, Export and Transfer of Conventional Arms”. The 28-member GGE, has since submitted its report.

It is important to state that our sub-region continues to witness conflicts of various dimensions as a result of illicit proliferation of Small Arms and light Weapons. Indeed, it is reported that for every African there are seven illicit bullets and three guns targeted at him or her. This, we believe, is scandalous especially at a time when an unacceptably high ratio of the world population still lives below the poverty line.
Mr. Chairman,

My delegation reaffirms that illicit trade and the diversion of these weapons constitute a major impediment to peace, stability and economic development of many developing states. We have therefore consistently advocated for international measures to check the proliferation of these weapons at national regional and international levels.

It is in this regard that Nigeria remains convinced of the absolute need for a universal, legally binding instrument in the form of an Arms Trade Treaty that would put in place a mechanism or framework that would ensure that licit SALWs are not delivered into illicit networks. It would also ensure that exporters, manufacturers or brokers whose arms are found in illicit markets are held accountable for such action.

Closely related is the need to have end-user certificates and international regulations of arms brokering activities that would control illicit cross-border movement of arms particularly in existing and potential conflict and post-conflict situations. They require strict monitoring and enforcement of arms embargoes. We believe that effective DDR is equally essential for those already in conflict or post conflict situation.

My delegation welcomes the report on the Biennial Meeting of States (BMS) to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, held in New York from 14th to 18th July 2003. Nigeria, however, wishes to stress the urgent need to pursue with vigour, the implementation of the aspects of the framework as it pertains to International cooperation, assistance and national capacity building, Stockpile management and surplus disposal, illicit brokering in small arms and light weapons. We urge member states to recommit themselves to the full implementation at the national regional and international levels. We further urge our development partners to make adequate provision of financial and technical assistance to speed up the implementation process by developing countries.

Former US President, President Eisenhower once stated, I quote “Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. The world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its labourers, the genius of its scientists, and the hopes of its children... This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron” end of quote.

Mr. Chairman,

These words are still true and germane today as when they were uttered on 16th April, 1953.

The current global crises are clarion calls on our consciences to curb the illicit circulation of arms and weapons. We need to look beyond the narrow prism of national commercial interest and embrace the more compelling and globally strategic reasons of practical solidarity with the international community on this issue. There is an urgent need to alleviate the unnecessary sufferings imposed on innocent victims of small arms and light weapons. The Arms Trade Treaty
therefore remains the most plausible solution to the tragedies that have come to bear on the innocent victims. In this regard, Nigeria stands ready to work in tandem with like-minded Member States in bringing about the adoption of an ATT resolution. The time is now.

I thank you.