Insecure Stockpiles Remain Sources for Armed Groups, Terrorists, Organized Crime, Secretary-General Tells Review Conference on Illicit Trade in Small Arms

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Following is UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s message, as prepared for delivery by UN Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson, to the Second Review Conference on the United Nations Programme of Action on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons, in New York, 27 August:

Allow me first to congratulate Ambassador Joy Ogwu on her election as President of this Second Review Conference on the Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons. President Ogwu, you have worked tirelessly to prepare for this Conference and I thank you for your leadership.

Illicit small arms remain the weapons of choice for those who seek to challenge legitimate State power, to spread fear and insecurity, or to pursue criminal goals. The human cost of the massive and destructive use of small arms and light weapons in armed conflict, piracy, gang warfare and crime-related violence is well documented. More than half a million people are killed each year. Civilians suffer most — particularly the poor.

Since the adoption of the Programme of Action in 2001, we have made some progress in tackling the illegal trade in small arms and light weapons. National legislation has improved in a number of countries. Procedures and national commissions have been established. Some Governments have improved the security of their depots, preventing the diversion of weapons and ammunition, which is a constant problem. But there are no quick solutions — it will take a sustained process that requires the commitment of all. The full implementation of the Programme of Action is both an urgent priority and a long-term project that will demand perseverance and resolve.

There is much work ahead. Many States still lack the capacity to exercise effective control over small arms and light weapons, and to stem the flow of illicit weapons across their borders. There is still limited cooperation among States in tracking illicit arms, despite the concrete and practical measures recommended in the seven-year-old International Tracing Instrument. Weapons continue to reach areas and entities under Security Council arms
embargoes. And in many countries, insecure stockpiles continue to be a source of arms and ammunition for armed groups, terrorists and organized crime.

Also, an arms trade treaty is long overdue. Agreement on such a convention would definitely make a big difference in addressing the havoc small arms — and other conventional arms and ammunition — are causing. I urge you to redouble efforts to agree on a robust “ATT” as soon as possible.

This Review Conference will allow States to discuss their achievements and how to further improve and strengthen their efforts in implementing the Programme of Action and its International Tracing Instrument. Ambassador Ogwu has already prepared a set of draft outcome documents that States have discussed in the numerous informal consultations before this Conference. I count on States to rally behind Ambassador Ogwu’s open and inclusive approach, and to agree on a strong, forward-looking outcome of this Conference.

The Secretariat will, of course, provide all the assistance required to make this meeting a success. Our collective responsibility is clear: to prevent the flow of illegal small arms into conflict and post-conflict areas and the hands of warlords, traffickers and criminals.

I wish you a productive Conference.