Discussion paper on promotion of a dialogue and a culture of peace by encouraging education and public awareness programmes on the problems of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects

I. Introduction

1. Considering that peace is the ultimate goal of preventing, combating and eradication of illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, generally most States believe that all efforts must be deployed to achieve peace within and among States. Since neither the absence of war, usually waged on political grounds, nor cessation of violence generally guarantees or even promotes lasting peace, States are conceiving a socio-cultural approach to attainment and promotion of lasting peace within the International Community.

2. Considering that conflict is an entirely human phenomenon, and its resolution is logically expected to be human-centered, the need to de-emphasize the increasing recourse to armed violence in conflict resolution has become central in various initiatives and mechanisms of the United Nations, since its foundation in 1945. This concept is in consonance with the UNESCO constitutional principle which says that since wars began in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.

3. It is pertinent to note that in 1997, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the year 2000 as the “International Year for the Culture of Peace”; and in 1998, the same Assembly declared the period 2001-2010 the “International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World”. Thus, the notion of a Culture of Peace has been prevailing in the world. As defined by the United Nations, the Culture of Peace is a set of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations (UN Resolutions A/RES/52/13: Culture of Peace and A/RES/53/243, Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace).

4. The expression “Culture of Peace” presumes that peace is a way of being, doing and living in society that can be taught, developed, and best of all, improved upon. As it can be inferred from the above definition, the agenda item is not aimed at imposing one culture over any other. It is neither directed at demonizing any culture either. Rather, it is a pragmatic approach aimed at
expediting the fulfillment of United Nations charter provisions, especially its purposes and principles. It represents essentially the yearnings of most Member states in this Biennial Meeting.

BENEFITS OF CULTURE OF PEACE

5. The culture of peace, and promotion of non-violence based on the principles established in the Charter of the United Nations and multilaterally agreed practices, as the primary platform sustaining the concept of preventive diplomacy, will provide, inter alia, the following benefits:

   • Avoidance of the untold sufferings inflicted upon millions of people by war, violence and their consequences;
   
   • Release of excessive war-related expenditure for civil developmental purposes.

HOW TO FOSTER THE CULTURE OF PEACE

6. For peace and non-violence to prevail, States need to foster a culture of peace through education. This may be achieved by:

   • Sustained efforts at re-education and reorientation of their citizens towards de-emphasizing first recourse to armed violence as a means of resolving conflicts;
   
   • Support for participatory communication and the free flow of information and knowledge. For the BMS 4 on PoA to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in SALW, this culture further underscores the importance of consistent and accurate reporting systems, exchange of information among States and regional groups, in respect of potential trafficking in, or illicit use of small arms and light weapons.
   
   • Promoting a culture of peace requires, in addition to above, the following:
     o The elimination of the crude acquisition of weapons of war/aggression.
     o The suppression of the notion of rightness of might.
     o The preference for dialogue.
     o The elimination of State violence which promotes even more violence.
     o The elimination of cruel and inhuman treatment.
     o The need to consider restriction of easy access to arms and weapons by citizens prone to misuse.
     o The reduction of violence in the media and in video games.
- The bending of swords into ploughs.
- Disarmament.

- Beyond these, a culture of peace would be enhanced by elimination of the root causes of conflict, including:
  - Lack of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.
  - Discrimination, marginalization and alienation.
  - Poverty and inequitable distribution of wealth/resources.
  - Injustice and lack of access to justice.
  - Cultural and parental practices that promote violence and unfair competition.
  - Religious intolerance.
  - Clash of civilizations.
  - Illiteracy and ignorance.