Thank you Mr. President.

I would like to express my gratitude for the opportunity to raise some of the issues regarding MENA region, a troubled region whose populations have been severely affected by armed violence and conflict. I don't want to oversimplify the causes of such conflict and violence, but one factor has been the easy availability of small arms, light weapons and their ammunition.

The proliferation of such arms and their diversion into the hands of non-State groups is not the result of one war or the failings of one country. It results from decades of instability in many countries across the region.

Many of our people still believe that acquiring more guns will bring more security. But this has proven time and again to be a false hope. Instead, real security comes from establishing the rule of law, institutions to ensure social justice and respect for human rights.

In one of our countries, a government investigation concluded that the stockpile management system did not have accurate information on the contents of individual warehouses at locations throughout the country. The system relied on an unsearchable, manual, paper-based inventory system for tracking equipment. As a result, finding items in the warehouse complex depended on the knowledge and memory of individual warehouse workers.

There was also poor physical storage: Equipment and ammunition that had never been inventoried was stored in shipping containers that are easy to break into.

The diversion of small arms and ammunition was caused not only by lack of capacity, but also by corruption. Army units reported they were short of ammunition needed for their training exercises, and meanwhile armed groups had accumulated large quantities of small arms and ammunition. Once those groups become established they can capture further weaponry, set up illegal markets and terrorise the civilian population. It becomes a spiralling cycle of violence.

Some of our countries have failed to dispose of surplus, accumulated or illegal weapons and ammunition that were designated for destruction. Confiscated, seized or collected small arms and light weapons have been recycled into dangerous and untrained hands, including into neighbouring regions.

In the Programme of Action, all Member States committed themselves to ensure that confiscated, seized or collected small arms and light weapons are destroyed and made permanently inoperable. We cannot allow those stocks to be diverted into illicit markets and fall into the hands of armed groups. We need better systems of management, and to use new technologies for permanent weapons deactivation.

Particularly in contexts of armed conflict, the misuse of arms can lead to the damage, destruction and closure of civilian infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, places of
work, markets, residential areas and places of religious and cultural significance, as well as to a breakdown in basic services. The proliferation of small arms tends to impact negatively on women's equality, their political participation, and their access to resources and opportunities. Yey in our region we have failed to establish mechanisms prevent gender-based violence to ensure the full participation of women in small arms control, or the collection and analysis of gender disaggregated data in this area.

We also need to devote resources to building a culture of non-violence and peace. This includes education and public awareness programs on the illicit arms trade and on the rule of law it also includes disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs, community violence reduction programmes and security sector reform.

Mr President, there are many civil society organisations working daily in the Middle East and North Africa region to bring peace and human security to the populations. These organisations can play an important role in principled partnership with governments to reduce demand for small arms. Cooperation by governments with civil society can include non-governmental organizations, research organizations, consumer associations and industry, in strengthening the implementation of the Programme of Action and the International Tracing Instrument.

Mr President, I believe that if Member States work in partnership with all stakeholders in civil society, we can together reduce the demand for weapons, improve controls and thus curb the armed violence and criminality that have such a damaging effect on our societies.

Thank you,