

Tackling the illicit spread of small arms and light weapons

Thank you very much, Mr. President. And thank you very much also to our two briefers this morning.

Mr. President, millions of people around the world are impacted directly or indirectly by the diversion of arms and illicit arms transfers. While small arms and light weapons have a legitimate role in ensuring defence and security, their diversion and misuse cost hundreds of thousands of lives every year, undermine security and sustainable development and fuel conflict, crime and terrorism.

The UN has an important role to play in supporting efforts to address illicit flows of small arms. There is no one size fits all solution, and to achieve real progress in this area, it is crucial that we bring on board all stakeholders, including the full and active participation of women in the disarmament community.

As the High Representative has set out this morning, the UN is carrying out considerable work to tackle the illicit spread of small arms and light weapons. I'd like to take this opportunity to commend the work of ODA and join the High Representative, in underlining the importance of the role of peacekeeping missions and SPMs in this area in line with their mandates. In his work, the UN must take into account existing guidance. For example, the 'Modular Small Arms Control Implementation Compendium' and the 'International Ammunition Technical Guidelines' provide international best practice in physical security and stockpile management, and should be considered consistently in UN. field work.

Mr. President, international cooperation in this area is vital. The UN Programme of Action is a key forum for international action and policy coordination. And we look forward to fruitful discussions through the course of the Seventh Biennial Meeting of States later this year.

The UK is also proud to participate this year in the Group of Governmental Experts on 'Problems arising from the accumulation of conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus'. We hope that this GGE will achieve tangible results addressing a long neglected problem in conventional arms control.

There is also important work to be done elsewhere. We reiterate our full support for the Arms Trade Treaty, a key multilateral tool in addressing the illicit trade and small arms and light weapons through its object and purpose: to create a well-regulated, legal trade in conventional arms.

Universalisation of the treaty, coupled with full implementation of its robust provisions, remains a priority for the UK. We continue to encourage all States that have not yet done so to make ratification an accession a national priority.

Mr President, we welcome the language in the SG report on Arms embargoes, which are a crucial tool in tackling the illicit spread of small arms and light weapons to many of the complex on this council's agenda.

I would like to take this opportunity to underline the importance of respect for and implementation of the arms embargoes that this council has agreed.

We welcome the emphasis on the SG's report on the need for flexibility and agree that arms embargoes should respond to changing contexts. However, the UK is concerned that arms embargoes are often lifted for political reasons. Without sufficient consideration being given to efficient management of small arms and light weapons and associated ammunition is the harm caused by their mismanagement.

The challenge for illicit small arms and light weapons, is a global one which requires international cooperation and action but we must also recognise that different regions face different challenges. The UK has been a consistent supporter of regional approaches in this area.

The Western Balkans roadmap, which is currently being implemented, is an excellent plan of action for that region and highlighted transferable lessons to be taken forward.

The UK would also like to take this moment to commend the African Union's goal of Silencing the Guns by 2020. It is vital that we seek to translate it into initiatives that will make a direct difference to the lives of ordinary people across Africa. Public buy-in and ownership of security sector reforms and policy will be crucial to this objective.

In addition, success in Silencing the Guns will require; a strong and effective partnerships to maximise results; effective preventative diplomacy and mediation; strengthening the role of women and youth in conflict resolution and prevention; and genuine and lasting security sector reform-on which the United Kingdom has a renewed focus in partnership with the African Union.

The UK remains committed to supporting African efforts in that regard through cooperation on initiatives for disarmament, surplus destruction, regulation of arms transfers, weapons marking, stockpile management and law enforcement cooperation across continents. This is a key strand of work for the British Armies Peace Support Team based in Nairobi. Through them, we provide technical advice and training on this issue to, amongst many others, the African Union Commission, AMISOM and its troop contributing countries.

Mr President, the UK continues to prioritise support to work on small arms, and provided technical and financial support bilaterally and through regional and multilateral organizations. Through this support, we are helping countries to strengthen arms control frameworks through national legislation, to implement better stockpile management procedures, and to tackle the grave challenges recognized in the SG's report. The drivers of terrorism, crime, poverty and exclusion which fuel the demand for illicit weapons.

Thank you very much.