

UK Statement at the 2006 Review Conference of the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects

Mr President,

The United Kingdom fully associates itself with the views expressed by the distinguished delegate of Austria [insert name], in [his/her] capacity as the Presidency of the European Union.

The United Kingdom remains committed to full implementation of the Programme of Action at national, regional and international levels. There are a number of important issues within the Programme of Action on which the UK believes the Review Conference should focus its attention. These are:

Transfer Controls, and

Small Arms Control and Development.

If we can reach common understanding on these issues and reflect them in the outcome document, then we can significantly strengthen the Programme of Action. But if we fail to address these issues successfully it will leave all of us open to the charge that we did not take seriously the commitments we made in 2001 when we agreed the Programme of Action.

Mr President,

The first issue I would like to address is effective regulation of Small Arms and Light Weapons transfers. This is specifically mentioned in the Programme of Action. I want to explain why we have worked with others to develop guidelines to enhance this section through the Transfer Controls Initiative (or TCI for short).

The Programme of Action refers to the need for consistency of national responsibilities under relevant international law. This was the essential bedrock we established back in 2001. Since then, however, many countries have come to the conclusion that the Programme of Action would benefit from further elaboration in the area of Transfer Controls. The question we need to consider here is: what exactly are our responsibilities under relevant international law?

For the past three years, the TCI has aimed to build agreement on the answer to this question. Wide consultations have taken place through regional organisations and multilateral forums.

We believe that a lot of common ground has been established. We are not far from agreement. A concrete outcome in the form of global guidelines would send a clear message that we are committed to implementing the Programme of Action in full. It would show that we are all determined to bring the illicit

trade in small arms under control and prevent weapons from being used to fuel conflict, undermine human rights and hold back development.

We would like to propose that this Conference takes account of these discussions and agrees to include appropriate language on agreed principles on transfer controls in the outcome document. Any areas that merit further discussion can be addressed at a later stage.

To help focus this discussion, the UK has put forward a Working Paper explaining the progress made by TCI since 2003. And we have distributed a reference booklet outlining all the national, regional and international agreements on transfer controls achieved in recent years.

I would like to acknowledge the important contribution of the Kenyan Government, which has put forward a Working Paper with some suggested international guidelines for transfer controls. These guidelines were drafted at the conference in Nairobi in April this year. They are an attempt to summarise existing national responsibilities in international law, and we would like to recommend them as the basis for discussion here.

I would like to thank distinguished delegates of the many states who have expressed support for the TCI and have participated in the regional workshops I referred to earlier. I hope they will voice their support for agreement on common minimum international guidelines for transfer controls over the next two weeks.

Mr President

The UK has allocated over £27 million since 2001 for measures to reduce the supply of and demand for small arms. We have supported NGOs and UN partners to collect and destroy weapons, improve weapons storage facilities, implement national and regional control agreements, and undertake public awareness campaigns.

And I would like to pay tribute to the significant achievements of some of our partners. UNDP, for example, has a global programme in over 30 countries supporting armed violence reduction and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration. The Regional Centre on Small Arms in Nairobi facilitated agreement of a legally binding protocol on small arms control by the governments of East Africa and the Great Lakes. And with their excellent high quality research, our NGO partners such as Saferworld, IANSA and the Small Arms Survey have improved our understanding of the illicit small arms trade – and our ability to do something to stop it.

Mr President

I would like to turn now to the second important issue for the UK: the relationship between Small Arms Control and Development. The UK is pleased to note the inclusion of language in the outcome document

highlighting the contribution of small arms control and armed violence reduction to development objectives.

This language is rooted in sound research. We know that arms availability does not *cause* crime or conflict. But it can accelerate a slide into violence that spreads fear and terror. We know that such insecurity, as much as any other factor, condemns the poor to continued poverty.

We also know that projects and programmes that try to persuade people to hand in their weapons only work if people feel safe and secure, and have real alternatives to violence. Our efforts to address weapons proliferation should be informed by the context in which they are acquired and used. In the countries most affected by armed violence, it is national governments and local civil society that understand this context best. Integrating small arms control into national development planning frameworks will ensure that decisions are made locally and reflect national and local priorities. And it would also help donors unlock more resources to support the implementation of the Programme of Action and other measures to reduce armed violence.

The UK is working hard within the OECD to enhance donor support and develop much-needed guidance on armed violence reduction. We were one of the 42 countries who, earlier this month in Geneva, endorsed the declaration committing us, collectively, to strive for measurable reductions in armed violence. The UK now looks forward to working with our partners to translate this commitment into action.

To conclude Mr President,

The UK fully recognises the vital importance of the work we are all engaged in to curb the illicit small arms trade. That is why we have devoted so much energy to this field. Progress has been made, but much, much more remains to be done. We intend, for example, to play a full part in the work of the Group of Government Experts which will consider how to enhance international co-operation in combating illicit brokering.

But the UK also believes that this Review Conference can and should produce effective outcomes, particularly on transfer controls and on small arms and development. This will help accelerate progress towards our collective goal of a stable and prosperous world free of arms trafficking and armed violence.