

Statement by Mr. Satyabrata Pal, Acting Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations, on Small Arms, at the Security Council, August 2, 2001

Mr. President,

We thank Colombia for calling this open meeting on small arms, and we are honoured that you, Mr. Minister, are presiding over it. As Ambassador Valdivieso's paper makes clear, the focus of this meeting is wider than that of the Conference last month, on the illicit trade in small arms, but the larger problems the Council will consider grow from the same roots.

As the Council said in its Presidential statement in September 1999, "the prevention of illicit trafficking is of immediate concern in the global search for ways and means to curb the wrongful use of small arms, including their use by terrorists". Perhaps 1% of the global stock of small arms is illicitly held, but that comes to 5 million weapons. Conflict diamonds constitute a similar tiny fraction of the global trade in roughs, but the international community is trying to put in place a stringent, verifiable system of controls to make illicit trade much more difficult. The Council has given that process its support, indeed the international effort to identify and ban conflict diamonds started here, and proscribing the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons must have at least as high a priority.

Like any other commodity, the trade in small arms is licit only if both exports and imports go through official, legal channels. Arms exported by a government that violate none of its laws are nevertheless illicit if they are sent to non-state actors in another country, bypassing or subverting laws there. Since terrorists and non-state actors exploit this loophole, buying arms on the international market when they are not covertly or illegally supplied by States that promote terrorism, the international community must agree, as it was unable to do at the Conference last month, that the trade in arms must, as the rest of international trade does, flow only through channels authorised by both exporting and importing governments. Members of this Council, given its role in the maintenance of international peace and security, obviously have a special responsibility, none more so than the permanent members, both because they are the largest arms exporters in the world and because, if they break the law, they can use the veto to protect themselves.

Over the last decade, the Council has established embargoes to cut off the supply of arms to violent non-state actors like UNITA, the RUF and the Taliban. When it found that these were easily bypassed, investigations it authorised showed how international criminal networks were being used to sell diamonds and supply arms in Angola and Sierra Leone. In Afghanistan, the principal exports of the Taliban are drugs and terrorism, and the arms embargo is as riddled with holes as the lattice-work for which one of its neighbours is famous. We hope that the monitoring mechanism that the Council set up for Afghanistan a few days ago will do its work well. If the arms embargo is still flouted, we expect the Council, as it has in West Africa, to tackle the problem at its roots, and take measures against those responsible.

Elsewhere, as the UN tries to help build peace after a conflict, disarmament is often the first and knottiest challenge its peacekeepers face. Your paper asks what happens to the small arms collected in a DDR campaign; they must be destroyed, but that is often the problem easiest to

resolve. Many of those who fight in these internecine conflicts have grown up with arms; in the world they know, a gun is the only means, they think, of staying alive. It protects them and they use it to force others to give them food and shelter. Unless the ON offers them security, and they have other means of livelihood, most do not give up their arms, or only a few of them. This means that the UN must send its peacekeepers so well-armed and equipped that they can truly offer security to all sections of the local population, and face down those who refuse to give up their arms. And it also means that the international community must be generous with its support for the economic programmes of rehabilitation; without this, combatants could be driven, by the fear of destitution if nothing else, to keep their arms.

Over the last fifty years, small arms have become enormously more lethal, the average assault rifle laying down the volume of fire of early machine guns. They have also become lighter, which means that children can use them much more easily. Much less training is needed with weapons that simply spray bullets over a wide range. And the cost of small arms has plummeted from the 1980s, as some armies laid off stocks. All this explains why small arms in the hands of ever younger combatants have been able to sustain conflicts hugely expensive in terms of lives lost, and why terrorists have been able to take such a heavy toll of innocent lives. Now, however, small arms are about to make another jump in technology. Some armies are receiving for field trials small arms that integrate ICT and other cutting-edge technologies into an assault rifle, making it infinitely more destructive. If the past is a guide, these weapons will turn up in the hands of non-state actors well before most Third World armies get them. These are the weapons that soldiers from developing countries will have to face from terrorists or insurgents at home, or, when they go out as blue helmets, abroad.

It is more than ever necessary, therefore, to have the strictest controls put in place on the manufacture and export of small arms. International instruments need to be negotiated quickly, and a system or mechanism put in place to trace and mark small arms, and ensure that they are not diverted from legal channels into the illicit trade. The Council should give its encouragement to this process.

Both the Conference on Illicit Trade in Small Arms and the paper prepared by Colombia recognise the usefulness of regional cooperation. However, as with narcotic drugs, with which illicit small arms and terrorism have a nexus, countries or regions into which these are smuggled can do only so much to stop the influx. In the case of narcotic drugs, the onus is placed on producing regions to control the problem at source. The cooperation of the countries and regions that are the principal manufacturers and exporters of arms is just as essential to the control of this illicit trade. Some of them have taken steps regionally to stop the illicit trade in weapons; we welcome this.

We trust that the Security Council will take effective, practical steps, carrying forward or in support of the Programme of Action adopted at the Conference last month, that would curb the availability and use of small arms to foment and sustain conflict and terrorism.

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