

United Nations Security Council Meeting  
on Small Arms under the Presidency of Lithuania  
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Open Debate on  
**"The human cost of the illicit transfer, accumulation, diversion and misuse  
of small arms and light weapons"**

**Statement**

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Mr. President of the Security Council, Mr. Secretary General, Distinguished members of the Council, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me begin, Mr. President, by expressing to you and your colleagues in the Security Council my sincere gratitude for giving me this opportunity to speak to you today.

I am here, not only in my capacity as President of West African Action Network on Small Arms (WAANSA) in Cote d'Ivoire and representative of our global network IANSA, but mostly and especially as the voice of the millions of innocent victims of illicit transfers, accumulation, diversion and misuse of small arms and their ammunition around the world, especially in Africa. My country Cote d'Ivoire and its people have suffered particularly because of it during the last decade.

I remember like it was yesterday, when this nightmare began. I was peacefully sleeping in my room at the University in Bouake, where I was in my first year of law school, when I was abruptly awakened by fusing shots from all sides: some frustrated individuals who had been denied the Ivorian citizenship had decided to take up arms- too readily available- to make their claim. We were terrorized for days, hunted like animals, without water, without food, without receiving help, constantly living in the fear of being killed. And we were not the only ones. The rest of the inhabitants suffered, as well, regardless of age, sex or status. We all paid the price, but for what? And why? When I returned to the neighborhood, one of my neighbors was forced, in order to feed her family, to yield to the intimidation and threats of armed individuals. I will never forget the tears on her face depicting her pain and the shame of having been a victim of forced prostitution and rape.

We were all victims of those armed men who would set up multiple barricades so that they could plunder passengers and traders of their property and often of their lives. And we ask the question: Where do these weapons and their ammunition come from, these weapons that enable all this violence, all this suffering?

I have personally witnessed the multiple abuses, the lifeless bodies lying in the middle of the roadway, the destroyed and burned buildings, and the streams of haggard and displaced refugees fleeing Abidjan by thousands for an unknown destination, leaving behind the entire fruit of a life-time of hard work. I also experienced the consequences of collapse of government control, where power fell to groups of young, lawless offenders, who had no difficulty getting hold of arms and ammunition, and who without any reason, would not hesitate to take

the life or to indulge in all forms of abuses on a terrorized and paralyzed population, particularly women and girls. All public infrastructures were destroyed, the population deprived of water, electricity, and food. Families were separated, the hospitals overwhelmed and unable to cope with the flood of the wounded. Many owed their salvation to the courage of some women who, at great risk to their lives, ventured out to bring a handful of cassava semolina called 'attieke.'

Mr. President, electoral dispute in my country led to a strong anarchic distribution of weapons and ammunition by some political leaders and also district leaders. These weapons and their ammunition had entered the country in violation of a UN arms embargo, from neighboring countries as well as trafficking circuits. The cost in human life was well over 3,000 and the total cost to the country is beyond any estimation. Obviously the ease of access to weapons and ammunition acquired by illicit means, by leakages from legal stockpiles, from military and police stock, and even by local manufacturing, were the main factors in this tragic toll. Similarly, illegal weapons and ammunition coming from the abandoned arsenals after the fall of Ghaddafi in Libya started to pour into the region and presently continue to flood our region and feed terrorist movements in Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon. As a consequence, democratic institutions are strongly destabilized and organized crime is spreading rapidly. It is therefore urgent, if we are to avoid the entire region being engulfed in protracted and unresolvable conflicts and overwhelmed by horrific crime, that the international community mobilize to counter this problem and act quickly to curb the proliferation of such weapons in Africa. It is also more than ever necessary that member states be encouraged to implement the UNPOA and the Arms Trade Treaty, two essential instruments to help curb and even eliminate the proliferation of illicit arms.

Mr. President,

It is an undeniable fact that the illicit transfer, accumulation, diversion and misuse of small arms and their ammunition are key factors in the human costs of destruction and destabilization.

UN Member States must do all they can to ensure they are meeting ALL relevant international obligations and commitments to control the movement and misuse of SALW and to stem the flood of arms into conflict zones. They must do more to enhance and strengthen international co-operation and assistance. This assistance can and should take many forms, from helping to ensure that

stockpiles—from the largest national armory to the smallest village police station—are secured, to assisting victims and survivors of armed violence, both conflict- and crime- related. Member States must also ensure that all peace-keeping operations include as fundamental to their mandates the need to prevent and combat small arms and ammunition proliferation and misuse. Member States should also support the work of civil society in helping to address small arms and ammunition proliferation—civil society played a pivotal role in the resolution of the Ivorian conflict, just as it has done and can do so again elsewhere.

In this regard, allow me Mr. President, to present to the Security Council the following three recommendations:

All UN member states must:

- Meet in full ALL of their commitments under the UN Programme of Action on small arms and follow-on biennial meetings and review conferences, including the International Tracing Instrument.
- Ratify the Arms Trade Treaty, and implement robustly in order to ensure the establishment of high new international norms. Similarly, all States should ratify the Firearms Protocol.
- Actively promote and support a full role for women as participants and decision-makers in addressing the proliferation and misuse of small arms and ammunition, including with regard to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, and in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peace processes at all levels.

I and countless innocent victims in my community and indeed all over the world have suffered the atrocious yet preventable reality of the misuse and proliferation of small arms. It is up to you at the UN Security Council to work together with the international community to prevent others from being subjected to such horrendous suffering. We perish or survive at your will.

Mr. President, I wish to conclude by reiterating my sincere thanks for this opportunity.