

Statement given by H.E. Mr. Paul Heinbecker
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada
to the United Nations Conference
on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects
July 11, 2001

Monsieur le président,

Nous sommes réunis ici aujourd'hui, à un tournant historique, avec un objectif en tête : remédier aux souffrances et à l'insécurité provoquées par l'accumulation excessive et déstabilisatrice et la prolifération incontrôlée des armes légères et de petit calibre.

La communauté internationale doit, à la faveur de cette conférence, exprimer sa volonté politique et son engagement à protéger les populations civiles et de mettre un frein à la prolifération globale des armes légères.

Seule l'instauration d'un partenariat véritablement mondial laisse espérer que nous viendrons à bout de ce problème.

Monsieur le président,

Les armes légères et de petit calibre sont réellement des armes de destruction massive.

Du fait de leur grande disponibilité, il est maintenant plus facile qu'avant de participer à des combats, qui sont aussi plus meurtriers, ce qui décuple le **coût humain** des conflits.

Les armes légères sont faciles à utiliser et à transporter.

Elles permettent de transformer facilement des enfants innocents en machines à tuer, dont l'efficacité donne froid dans le dos.

Elles mettent en danger les militaires, les policiers et les travailleurs humanitaires, dont le travail même consiste à aider les victimes des conflits.

L'insécurité provoquée par l'abus de ces armes peut rendre le développement durable impossible.

Certes, les problèmes que pose leur contrôle sont complexes, mais se résument

souvent à une question d'offre et de demande et, pour tout dire, à la nécessité de mobiliser le courage politique nécessaire pour trouver une solution.

C'est la première fois que les Nations Unies organisent une conférence internationale sur les armes légères et de petit calibre.

Cette rencontre a attiré une attention nouvelle du monde entier sur ce problème jusqu'ici négligé.

L'Afrique a déjà montré la voie dans ce dossier en adoptant la Déclaration de Bamako, à l'instar de l'Amérique latine et des Antilles en ce qui concerne la Déclaration de Brasilia.

En novembre 2000, les pays de l'OSCE ont fait un pas dans la bonne direction en s'engageant à prendre des mesures contre les armes légères.

Nous devons mettre à profit ces premiers efforts régionaux et les intégrer à notre travail.

Au niveau global, le Protocole sur les armes feu, récemment approuvé, est un outil important pour l'application de la loi et la coopération afin de lutter efficacement contre le trafic d'armes à feu.

Canada believes that the concluding document of this Conference should set out a global Programme of Action for dealing with the small arms problem in a **comprehensive way**.

In Canada's view, a meaningful action plan should include relevant norms and a series of concrete measures.

This will ensure that the Programme of Action will have a real impact on global human security by reducing the numbers of small arms and light weapons in circulation around the world by preventing problematic transfers and by promoting transparency and openness.

The Programme of Action should be targeted at the global, regional, national and local levels, providing the international community with a road map for its future work.

Many of these weapons are recycled, passed on from area to area, from one

conflict to another, by unscrupulous arms merchants, who in many cases take advantage of legal loopholes or exploit inadequate national monitoring and enforcement structures.

That is why this Conference is so vitally important.

In our view the Programme of Action must include measures which would increase **controls governing legal transfers** of small arms and light weapons.

Such measures are necessary in order to prevent diversion to illicit or unauthorised destinations and to prevent and reduce proliferation and misuse of these weapons.

It is now widely agreed that international efforts to prevent and combat diversion of arms to illicit markets would be strengthened by improving our collective capacity to **trace** illicit small arms and light weapons back to their source and to clarify the chain of transactions.

This will allow us to identify the point where legal arms were diverted to the illicit trade and thus to take strong actions.

In Canada's view, an effective international system to promote "traceability" requires three key elements: systems to ensure adequate and reliable marking of all arms; adequate record-keeping on arms production, possession and transfers; and international arrangements to enable timely and reliable tracing of lines of supply by relevant authorities.

Problems associated with small arms and light weapons first arose within the United Nations as both a disarmament and **peacekeeping issue**.

We strongly believe that the mandates of UN peacekeeping operations should contain clear provisions for disarmament, including weapons collection and destruction.

In this context, Canada and the European Union hosted in Ottawa two months ago a workshop on "Small Arms and Light Weapons Destruction in the Context of Peace Support Operations".

The workshop's participants made practical recommendations as to how, in cooperation with the United Nations and other international organizations, we might prepare better to plan and execute destruction operations.

I am pleased to table those recommendations before you today - you will find them in the annex of my written text.

Canada believes that an effective action plan to reduce the global **surplus** of small arms, coupled with proper management and security of national stockpiles, is central to the reduction of small arms and the prevention of illicit trafficking.

Moreover, it is generally accepted that the majority of small arms and light weapons are legally produced, transferred or sold and only later in their life cycles they enter into illicit circulation.

In order to deal effectively with the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, we must therefore tackle the nexus where legal weapons become illegal ones.

Key to this effort is the international community's ability to oversee and regulate either at the national, regional or international level the **legal transfer** of these weapons.

Imagine a child shot dead.

Imagine a child shooting at other people.

Two million children were killed by small arms during the past ten years.

Some three hundred thousand children under the age of 18 are fighting as soldiers.

We, Canadians, are deeply concerned by these human realities.

The specific targeting of civilians, including **women and children**, is one of the tragic realities of armed conflict today.

Last September, at the International Conference on War-Affected Children, held in Winnipeg, Canada, the impact of small arms on children was identified as an immediate priority for international action.

For too many children in the world today, the first encounter with the technology of the 21st century is not the screen of a personal computer, but the barrel of a gun.

We know that small arms directly threaten the lives of children, often causing death or injury and psycho-social trauma.

Horrifically, we have also seen that the size and ease of use of these weapons have made it possible for children to serve armed factions as combatants.

Millions more children have been denied access to education and health care, critical to their development and well-being.

Moreover, the proliferation and misuse of small arms have a grave impact on the primary sources of security for a child - its family and community - ultimately denying children their freedom and indeed their very childhood.

Deeply concerned by this reality, Canada has commissioned a study on the impact of small arms on children.

The Bitting the Bullet group of NGOs was chosen to coordinate and produce this study.

I am pleased to announce that the study will be officially launched this evening and that copies will be available for all as of tomorrow.

We hope that the recommendations of this study will contribute to comprehensive global efforts to mitigate the negative effects of small arms on children.

Canada would also like to seize the opportunity to thank the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, on behalf of the Human Security Network.

Jordan will facilitate distribution of a statement to the Conference outlining the Human Security Network's commitment to intensify and coordinate efforts to address the human suffering caused by the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons.

Members of the Network, including Canada, regard this Conference as an invaluable opportunity to advance practical work and build global consensus on this issue.

The statement encourages Conference participants to adopt a comprehensive and coordinated approach and to take concrete measures.

Action is what we now need.

Mr. Chairman,

Sustained and practical **follow-up** to the Programme of Action will be crucial to the credibility of our enterprise.

The Conference should establish annual multilateral meetings to promote exchange, cooperation and a "forward look" of progress in implementing the norms and measures agreed in the Programme of Action.

This process should promote sharing of experiences to facilitate the development of "best practices" and provide a stimulus for effective action.

Canada believes that **non-governmental organizations** and other representatives of civil society are playing a crucial role in global efforts on Small Arms.

Continued constructive engagement of industry, civil society and all actors is crucial to Conference success and even more importantly to the implementation of the Programme of Action.

The problems posed by small arms are complex, and the solutions will require ingenuity as well as determination. Governments alone cannot solve them.

We look forward to greater partnership between governments and civil society in taking action on the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

Cette conférence peut être un gage d'espoir pour les victimes du fléau que représentent ces armes.

Il nous incombe à tous d'élaborer un programme d'action qui réponde à leurs appels à l'action comme d'agir et de parler au nom de ceux qui ne peuvent le faire.

Il faut que cette conférence débouche sur une action réelle et décisive.

De cette façon, je crois que nous pourrons vraiment changer la vie de millions de gens dans le monde entier.

Merci.