

Small arms and light weapons - Statement by Mr. François Delattre, Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations - Security Council - 13 May 2015

I would, first of all, like to thank Lithuania for having organized an open debate on the central issue of small arms and light weapons. The statements made by the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights help us to gauge the real scale of the problem. I would also like to thank Mr. Diakité for his briefing on the situation in West Africa — a region that is, unfortunately, particularly affected by the proliferation of small weapons — and for his very powerful testimony. We will certainly heed his call.

France also associates itself fully with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union. Today's debate is based on an alarming fact. According to the Small Arms Survey research project, over 800 million small arms and light weapons are in circulation around the world. These weapons have caused over half a million deaths each year and are responsible for almost 90 per cent of the victims of armed conflicts. Make no mistake — today, small arms are by far the most lethal weapons in the world. Their main victims, unfortunately, are too often civilians, among whom women and children are particularly affected.

The proliferation of such weapons also fuels regional conflicts and benefits terrorist groups, which thus armed can continue their destabilizing and barbarous activities. It also sows the seeds for organized crime, which no longer knows any borders. And this phenomenon is constantly evolving. Porous borders in conflict zones, combined with advances in technology, communications, finance and transportation, have fostered relations among terrorist networks and criminal groups operating internationally, making the fight against this scourge even more complex. Lastly, by encouraging the continuation of conflicts and the destabilization of entire regions the illicit trafficking in those deadly weapons presents a major obstacle to the socioeconomic development of the most fragile States.

In the face of this dark scenario, the international community cannot stand idly by. France is also aware of the particular responsibility that falls upon it as an arms-exporting country. That is why we, together with our partners, have joined the front ranks in the combat against the illicit trafficking in small arms. The United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, adopted by consensus in 2001, was the first cornerstone of this edifice, providing a general framework for efforts aimed at containing the flow of small arms. The International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons, which was authored by France and Switzerland, further bolstered that framework in 2006. We would now like to see the Programme of Action, which is still legally non-binding, be strengthened in the years to come.

In the face of such a scourge, which defies the authority of States, the adoption of legally binding instruments is indeed essential. That is why we were among the first, together with our European partners, to promote an Arms Trade Treaty that is commensurate with the scale of this challenge, and which today has become transnational. We worked together to achieve a demanding and innovative treaty that, first, imposes a new global standard for the trade in conventional arms, including ammunition; secondly, triggers, for the first time, the responsibility of exporting States; and, thirdly, accords a paramount role to human rights and international humanitarian law by banning the export of all kinds of arms when there is a risk of genocide or crimes against humanity. Together with African States, we fought to make sure that the Treaty ultimately included small arms and light weapons in its scope of application.

The historic adoption of the Treaty by the General Assembly in April 2013 (resolution 67/234 B) and its entry into force last December will contribute to providing solutions to the illicit trafficking in small arms. France is proud to have been among the first to sign and ratify that treaty. In that regard, we call on all Member States to sign and ratify the treaty, which will strengthen international peace and security.

Other instruments exist, and they must, of course, be supported. In the framework of the European Union, for a long time we adopted common measures against the stockpiling and destabilizing proliferation of small arms, as well as a common position on controlling the brokering of arms deals. Finally, we also participate in the financing of innovative instruments, such as the iTRACE programme and the INTERPOL iARMS system.

We welcome the fact that Lithuania has decided to continue the deliberation within the Security Council launched two years ago by Australia, which led to the adoption of resolution 2117 (2013). That resolution served as a major step forward by actively involving all the instruments of our Organization in order to better combat the destabilizing and illicit trafficking in such weapons in all regions of the world. The efforts undertaken by Lithuania with a view to adopting a new resolution on the subject are, in that context, extremely important. The fight against the trafficking in small arms should indeed be a cross-cutting topic in all the areas of United Nations activities: within the sanctions committees and the panels of expert in charge of monitoring embargoes, but also within peacekeeping operations and special political missions, when that is deemed useful and necessary. Structures within the United Nations involved in combating terrorism can also play an important role, and we hope that the issue will be systematically taken into account in the work of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Sanctions Monitoring Team of the Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee.

The Secretary General's report on small arms (S/2015/289), circulated a few weeks ago, provides important clarifications and additional recommendations that we will also need to implement. We would like, as recommended by the Secretary-General, for this issue to remain on the agenda of the Council. Control over all arms is the primary condition for security in the world. For France, this is not just a conviction, it is a historical commitment. No doubt because our country has been the theatre of many wars, we have been, and continue to be, one of the countries that is most favourable to disarmament. We will continue this fight as long as necessary, together with the international community.