

The human cost of the illicit transfer, destabilising accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons.

As delivered by Gerard van Bohemen, Permanent Representative of New Zealand, 13 May 2015

Madam President, I am pleased and honoured to take part in this debate under your leadership. I look forward to getting to know my other colleagues on the council as soon as possible.

Madam President.

The problem of small arms and light weapons is extremely important but also very difficult. One reason it is difficult is that it is a hard issue to consider in the abstract. So much depends on the conditions in the society, country and region where the problem arises.

Take my own country as an example. On a per capita basis, New Zealanders have quite an arsenal of weapons in private homes. But these are mostly for recreational purposes and the use of fire arms in social unrest, crime and domestic violence is relatively rare in my country, although sadly it is on the increase. Our Police are still not routinely armed when they are on the beat. This is possible because the history, economic and social conditions and the physical location of our country have meant that guns are not a major social problem – at least not yet.

But that is not the case in many countries, which are awash with firearms, and where firearms are all too often a weapon of first resort. We do not buy the bumper sticker that “people, not guns kill people”. Guns are a problem in their own right and they warrant our attention.

So too does the issue of ammunition as the Secretary General has reminded us.

Experience has shown that firearms can make a bad situation much worse; and the presence and use of a lot of fire arms can tear the fabric of society, threaten the security of a country and destabilise a region. Even a small number of guns in the wrong hands can have devastating consequences, especially in vulnerable communities. Too often, the innocent suffer the most; children and caregivers, usually women, as the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and Mr Diakité have graphically pointed out.

There are numerous examples from all parts of the world – from South America and North America, from the Caribbean, the Middle East, Europe – West and East, Africa and Asia. My own region, the Pacific, is not immune – as has been shown in the Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste.

It is the ubiquity and seriousness of this problem that has led to international efforts to control the proliferation of small arms and light weapons – in particular the Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons and, most significantly, the negotiation, adoption and entry into force of the Arms Trade Treaty, which New Zealand has ratified.

New Zealand hailed the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty as one of the most important arms control agreements adopted in recent years. Its achievement, together with the adoption of the Cluster Munitions Convention, rank as signal successes. They stand in stark contrast to the meagre returns in other disarmament negotiations – a situation that is being closely and critically scrutinised in an adjacent chamber.

Madam President.

This Council has an important and long standing role in this issue as it has shown in the imposition of arms embargos and the adoption of measures to disarm and demobilise combatants, secure the collections of weapons and prevent their diversion.

In Resolution 2117, the Council provided a framework for a more consistent approach to this set of issues. We sincerely hope that the Council will be able this week to build on that achievement by adopting a further resolution that will:

- Promote a more integrated approach to addressing small arms and light weapons issues across the UN agenda;
- That will encourage enhanced support from UN agencies to host countries in countering illicit transfers and the destabilising accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons;
- And that will strengthen the implementation of arms embargoes.

We commend Lithuania for its concept note and for its preparation of a comprehensive draft resolution.

Madam President.

New Zealand is concerned that there is serious contention over one aspect of the draft – namely the language bearing on illicit transfers to non-state actors – which was not included in Resolution 2117.

For its part, New Zealand could accept any of the formulations under discussion and we believe that with a modicum of goodwill, a solution can be found.

While recognising the strength of the positions in play, we are concerned that a battle over an issue on which none of the key arms exporting protagonists can plead a clean record, threatens to subvert the much larger gains that this resolution represents for the wider UN membership, especially the small and the vulnerable who suffer the consequences and reap none of the rewards of the global arms trade.

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