



*Co-operating to Disarm*

**5<sup>TH</sup> REVIEW CONFERENCE OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS**

**Hotel Source du Nil**

**20 – 21 April 2009**

**Opening Remarks**

**By**

**HON. ALAIN BUNYONI**

**(BURUNDI MINISTER OF PUBLIC SECURITY**

**& RECSA CHAIRMAN, COUNCIL OF MINISTERS)**

**Our Guest of Honour, First Deputy President of the Republic Dr Yves SAHINGUVU;**

**Honourable Yacin Elmi BOUH, the Djibouti Minister for Interior and Vice-Chairman, RECSA Council of Ministers;**

**Honourable Ministers and other Plenipotentiaries from RECSA Member States;**

**Dr Francis K. Sang, RECSA Executive Secretary;**

**Mr Onesphore MBAZUMUTIMA, Burundi National Focal Point Coordinator and the Chair, RECSA Technical Advisory Committee;**

**National Focal Point Coordinators from other RECSA Member States;**

**Senior Government Officials;**

**Representatives from International and Inter-governmental organizations;**

**Representatives of Civil Society Organizations;**

**Members of the Media;**

**Distinguished Participants;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

As its term in office as the Chair of the RECSA Council of Ministers and the Technical Advisory Committee comes to an end, Burundi has the honour to host the 5<sup>th</sup> Council of Ministers meeting. The conference comes at a time when the uncontrolled proliferation of small arms and light weapons and high levels of armed violence pose a significant obstacle to human development.

Every year thousands of people die and millions more are left injured by gunshot wounds. The misuse of small arms undermines people's livelihoods and economic security. It prevents teachers and children from going to school, places a heavy burden on healthcare services, obstructs development and threatens the physical security of the citizenry. We welcome the attention given to the problem through this meeting and call for support to increase our capacity to control small arms and reduce armed violence.

In Burundi, the Government lends full support to various international instruments drawn up to address the problem of small arms.

At the global level, we have played a key role in the establishment of the United Nations Program of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (UNPoA). Through RECSA and the National Focal Point for the Management and Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, Burundi reaffirms her strong commitment to tackling the problems associated with small arms. As a nation dedicated to peace and advocating the culture of peace, we are determined to intensify efforts to eradicate the problem of illicit small arms.

Through the CDCPA the Government aims to disarm the civilian population and to track international commitments made by Burundi in the framework of the fight against proliferation of SALW. In this endeavour, the CDCPA cooperates with appropriate agencies, international organizations, regional and sub regional bodies.

Through funding from UNDP, the Burundi NFP has been implementing a project to raise awareness among civilians to boost the disarmament program and the fight against proliferation of SALW. Relevant programs for public awareness to improve the level of voluntary surrender of illegal weapons have been conducted but have produced mixed results given the shaky security situation in the country.

Even in this scenario, we must recognize the hope created by the democratic process in 2005 which led to elections in 2007. By then, more than 10,000 weapons had been removed from the hands of illegal users. The civil society has helped to increase awareness among civilians on the need to voluntarily surrender weapons.

Varying levels of success have been achieved under the disarmament efforts. In 2008, for example, more than 500 weapons were handed over to the Government. The operation to search the National Police led to the recovery of more than 25,000 weapons of all types. These statistics put the number of withdrawals and remittances of SALW since 2005 at around 40,000 weapons.

Small Arms Survey and ITEKA League estimate that 100,000 weapons are held illegally in the country. A lot of work therefore remains to be done to completely rid our country of arms in the wrong hands.

The Government of Burundi embraces and encourages various strategies that promise a viable solution to the problem of illicit firearms. The signing onto the Nairobi Declaration of 2000 and the 2004 Nairobi Protocol for the Prevention, Reduction and Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region, The Horn of Africa and Bordering States are but a few examples of the government's commitment to this challenge.

Out of its commitment towards the implementation of these two processes, Burundi is at an advanced stage in finalising its National Action Plan, a strategy developed to guide the country's control and management of small arms and light weapons. It is expected that once the draft is ready, it will be forwarded to the Government for approval to enable the design of relevant programmes to commence.

In line with requirements of the Nairobi Protocol, Burundi is now implementing an arms marking project under which all state-owned arms are to be marked for easy identification and tracing. This process is being undertaken with arms marking machines donated to the Government by RECSA. This follows an arms marking training for law enforcement officers in Nairobi, South Africa and nationally. The Government of Burundi thanks RECSA to support in this area as it continues to make progress in addressing the problem of small arms

Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me to reiterate Burundi's support to the RECSA Secretariat. **As the Chairman of the Council of Ministers I have had the privilege to work closely with the Secretariat, especially the Executive Secretary, Dr Francis K. Sang with whom I collaborated closely during my tenure as the Chairman of the Council of Ministers. Together we visited 11 RECSA Member States, briefing the various Governments of the regional progress made in the implementation of the Nairobi Protocol. At the same time we called on senior officials to remind their Governments to make financial contributions to the Secretariat. The countries have re-affirmed their commitment to supporting the organisation and we hope they will fulfil their obligations in due course.**

During my tenure as Chairman of the Council of Ministers, I accompanied the Executive Secretary and several of his officers to New York to attend the 3<sup>rd</sup> Biennial Meeting of States. While in New York I made a statement on behalf of the RECSA Member States in line with the thematic issues under discussion in the meeting.

I call on all Member States to throw their full support behind the organisation to enable it to succeed in fulfilling its mandate. It will be recalled that Member States committed themselves to make yearly financial contributions towards the smooth running of the Secretariat. On behalf of the Council of Ministers I wish to thank the Kenya Government for leading the way in by making its contributions in full, five years in advance. Rwanda and Uganda have also made their contributions in part, with Rwanda going further by pledging this year's contribution in full. Other countries are challenged to fulfil their financial obligations.

On behalf of RECSA I wish to thank the donor community for continued support to the organisation. We look forward to further collaboration in programme work to address the problem of small arms in the region.

Finally, I take this opportunity to welcome the distinguished delegates to the 5<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Review Meeting. Feel at home in Burundi.

**I thank you.**