



Cooperating to Disarm

Statement by

DR FRANCIS K. SANG, CBS

Executive Secretary, Regional Centre on Small Arms

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Committee on General and Complete Disarmament**

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**PO Box 7039, 00200 Nairobi, Kenya; Tel: 254-20-3877456/3876203/3876023; Fax:
254-20-3877397; Email: info@recsasec.org**

Mr Chairman,

At the outset I wish to join delegates who have taken the floor before me, to extend the Regional Centre on Small Arms' congratulations on your election to preside over this Committee during the current General Assembly session. Through you, may I also congratulate the entire Bureau and pledge the support and cooperation of the Regional Centre on Small Arms' (RECSA).

Mr Chairman,

Africa is among the most affected continents by the problem of illegal arms. A large number of weapons are in the wrong hands. This has been exacerbated by many conflicts that have taken place or that are still taking place on the continent fuelling the need for arms among militias. The need for disarmament in conflict-prone regions cannot therefore be gainsaid.

Disarmament remains an indispensable tool to help create a secure environment that is favourable for human development, as enshrined in the letter and the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations. Indeed, arms control and disarmament issues are critical to the peace and welfare of Africa and the world at large.

The primary objective of practical disarmament measures is more effective control over the frequently used tools of combat. It ensures that these are not used to re-ignite intra and inter state conflicts.

Mr Chairman,

In the Great Lakes Region, the Horn of Africa and Bordering States, RECSA Member States have continued to undertake measures both internally and jointly across borders to control the number of arms in the wrong hands. RECSA supports its Members in these efforts.

Mr Chairman, allow me to go through the experiences of a cross section of our Member States.

Mr Chairman, through funding from UNDP, the **Burundi National Focal Point on Small Arms Control and Management** 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 with much success. Many citizens are now turning up at collection centres to give up arms acquired during Burundi's period of conflict.

In **Kenya** the President, His Excellency Mwai Kibaki, has recently issued an order requiring disciplined forces to disarm civilians in possession of illegal arms, while calling on those citizens owning such weapons to surrender them or face prosecution. Although disarmament activities have been taking place periodically in areas most affected by high numbers of illegal arms, there has been a recent need to give impetus to disarmament efforts in light of the increasing number of arms flowing into the country from neighbouring states in conflict. The disarmament exercise has been preceded by a study in the affected parts of the country on the best methods for disarmament and ensuring sustainable development among disarmed groups to reduce the need for arms. Employment of disarmament methods agreed upon with affected communities ensures success of the exercise more than forced means.

Mr Chairman,

In **Rwanda**, the disarming of 4,000 returnee combatants from the DRC is recognised as a priority by the Government in an effort to mop up illegally held arms. In addition, other members of the public who may be in possession of illegal arms or who know

people in possession of such weapons are encouraged to surrender them or report to the police. In exchange, the Government is promoting income generating activities in view of the fact that armed violence hinders and retards sustainable development while at the same time poverty increases the potential for armed violence.

In the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, the National Focal Point on Small Arms Control and Management has been working closely with a national NGO to collect arms surrendered from citizens. Sensitisation workshops are held to raise awareness about the disarmament exercise in those parts of the country severely affected by a large number of illegal arms.

Mr Chairman,

Somalia has been devastated by years of continued violence and instability and after over 15 failed attempts at peace; there is a renewed sense of hope that the final reconciliation corner has been turned. An internationally supported Unity Government was formed in Djibouti early this year with a subsequent move of all its institutions to the capital city, Mogadishu. However, the existence of an estimated over 60,000 militia constrains state building efforts and necessitates the urge for a comprehensive Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program. In a renewed effort and as part of security sector reform measures, the National Unity Government has recently formed the Ministry of DDR, whose focus will be to lead and coordinate all efforts on Militia DDR with, hopefully, the help of the local, regional and International Community. RECSA is hopeful that these efforts will mark the return to peace in Somalia.

Sudan has established disarmament commissions for both the North and the South. The two bodies are coordinating disarmament among citizens and ex-combatants in the two parts of the country to mop up arms left in illegal possession of citizens after the end of a 21 year war between the two regions. The disarmament challenge is great in Sudan; nevertheless the Government is unrelenting in efforts to control the number of illegal

arms among citizens. It is expected that a combination of disarmament and comprehensive small arms control measures should enhance security in the country. Sudan employs a people-driven approach involving the communities affected by insecurity and other stakeholders at the local level.

The Government of **Uganda** is committed to the removal of illegal weapons from circulation as an important and necessary means of addressing the problems posed by the proliferation of a large number of weapons in the wrong hands. The country has undertaken destruction of large numbers of assorted small arms and light weapons, ammunition, and unexploded ordnances to ensure they do not find their way into illegal circulation. The Government has put in place a disarmament and development programme in one of the most affected regions by the small arms problem. The programme is a comprehensive plan that focuses on a range of issues that influence the availability and access to small arms. In addition it addresses the factors that drive demand for small arms and light weapons. Weapon collection activities in Uganda have been undertaken within the context of peace-building programmes, whose efforts are linked with initiatives to address the root causes of conflict and insecurity for long-term development.

Mr Chairman,

Disarmament efforts in the Member States are followed by public destruction of the recovered arms by burning or rendering them unusable through cutting to ensure they do not find their way back into circulation. This public undertaking is also carried out as part of public awareness to sensitise communities of Governments' efforts to mop up illegal arms in their countries.

Mr Chairman,

With funding from the Japan Government, RECSA will provide further support to Member States by boosting their capacity to undertake disarmament. The one year project *Enhancing Human Security in the Great Lakes Region and Horn of Africa by Preventing Proliferation of Illicit Small Arms through Practical Disarmament* will see

member states receive training in the area of disarmament and stockpile management including creating and maintaining small arms databases for effective record keeping. Member States will in addition contribute to the development of best practice guidelines on disarmament.

Development of these guidelines is in recognition of the fact that there is a lack of regional standards on disarmament of armed groups. This has hindered cooperation between governments to undertake joint operations due to legal and policy divergences. The need for a regional approach in disarmament exercises is thus long overdue. The best practice guidelines will enhance regional cooperation in undertaking joint cross border operations which are more effective than isolated initiatives by individual countries.

Mr Chairman,

RECSA is also engaged in other measures to control the problem of small arms in its member states. We have donated two machines to each Member State to facilitate arms marking of legally held arms. The machines were purchased with funds from the US Government and the German Government through the East African Community/GTZ partnership. The arms marking exercise is in line with the requirements of the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms in all its Aspects and the Nairobi Protocol being implemented in the Great Lakes Region, the Horn of Africa and Bordering States. Marking ensures enhanced stockpile management by easing tracing of arms.

In addition, RECSA is working closely with Member States that do not yet have strategies in place to deal with the problem of small arms. So far, we have supported seven countries to develop their National Action Plans on Small Arms Control and Management (NAPs). While Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania have had their Plans in place for a number of years, Rwanda and Burundi completed the development process of their strategies earlier on in the year and are now embarking on implementation. The Djibouti draft document is currently under discussion at the National Focal Point level before being submitted to Cabinet for further discussion and approval. The Eritrea

document is under review by a national team and is expected to be submitted to RECSA in the coming weeks. The next country of focus for NAP development is Ethiopia. These strategies will, in addition to addressing other issues, guide countries when conducting disarmament exercises.

Mr Chairman,

RECSA is working in close collaboration with the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC) and is supporting efforts to build the capacity of countries to undertake effective disarmament. In addition, RECSA is working closely with a number of regional bodies to consolidate gains in controlling the problem of small arms in the continent.

The Regional Centre on Small Arms welcomes the attention given to the problem of small arms and the challenge of disarmament through this meeting and calls for support to increase our capacity to control small arms and reduce armed violence.

I thank you for your attention.