

## **Co-Chairs' Summary**

### **"The Implementation, by the Arab States, of the UN Programme of Action on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons"**

#### **Introduction:**

The Conference for The Implementation, by the Arab States, of the UN Programme of Action on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons was held from 16 to 18 December 2003 at the Seat of the League of Arab States, in Cairo, Egypt. The conference was organized by the United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs in cooperation with the League of Arab States Department for Disarmament and with the generous support of the governments of Germany and Norway.

The conference was held with the participation of 21 Arab countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen. Also attending were delegates of other interested countries: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Russian Federation, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Several Department and Agencies of the United Nations and of the League of Arab States participated in the conference. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the International Committee of the Red Cross as well as NGOs and civil society organizations did also attend the conference.

The Conference was co-chaired by the United Nations and the League of Arab States' Departments for Disarmament Affairs.

#### **Day One**

United Nations Under Secretary General for Disarmament Affairs H.E. Mr. Nobuyasu Abe, and the Secretary General of the League of Arab States, H.E. Mr. Amre Moussa opened the conference. In their opening statements they welcomed this conference as a first in the ongoing cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States, and stressed the importance of addressing the Programme of Action on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, by the Member States of the League of Arab States.

Throughout the Conference, it appeared that many States in the Arab region have already taken steps in their implementation of the Programme of Action, at the national and regional level. Furthermore, the discussion allowed for a fruitful exchange of views and experiences in ways to tackle the many challenges posed to States by the complex and multidimensional nature of the SALW issue. Capacity building and cooperation were deemed to constitute important elements to making progress in this endeavour.

In the first thematic session, the discussions focussed on **National Capacity Building**, including **National Challenges** and **National Responses**.

Conference participants noted that Arab States' challenges and responses differed according to the nature and extent of the small arms problem they faced. Particular difficulties were faced by States which had recently emerged from conflict or were presently confronted with civil strife and instability. The situation in one part of the Arab Region was linked to that in another. Even States which strictly regulated small arms, at all levels, could see their efforts undermined by inadequate control measures in other countries.

At the national level, States are challenged by the complex and multidimensional nature of the small arms issue. One key challenge is effective policing, including the policing and control of borders. Another is the development and effective implementation of legislation covering the various aspects of the small arms issue.

Legislations and regulations are already in place in many countries. The legislative challenge includes the areas of production (marking), stockpiles, civilian possession and brokering. Conference participants heard that efforts to meet this challenge are well advanced in many parts of the Arab Region as laws and regulations are amended and extended in light of evolving experience and conditions. The need to tackle demand for small arms through education, awareness-raising, security sector reform and good governance was also raised by representatives of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

Building capacity to implement the UN Programme of Action in the Arab Region was another key topic of discussion during this session. The need

for financial resources, equipment, expertise and training were all mentioned in this regard.

Arab States are designating National Points of Contact in ever greater numbers, as provided for in the Programme of Action. Some Arab States are now moving to the next critical step in Programme implementation, namely the establishment of National Coordination Agencies. The latter bodies are especially important for Programme implementation as they bring together a broad range of governmental stakeholders. It was also noted that National Coordination Agencies are a necessary mechanism for governments' agencies to address national challenges in an integrated manner. The importance of establishing a regional point of contact within the League of Arab States was highlighted.

The importance of national reporting on Programme implementation was another theme of this session. It was stressed that the structures needed for reporting on the national implementation of the Programme of Action were the same structures needed for actual implementation.

In this session and throughout the Conference, participants emphasized that national efforts, while essential in addressing the small arms problem, were not sufficient, and needed to be complemented by cooperation at the regional and global levels involving the full range of actors engaged with this issue.

The afternoon session was devoted to **Effective Partnerships and Synergies**.

Participants heard a presentation on the work of the Group of Interested States. This open-ended informal group of States, chaired by Germany, meets in New York, on a regular basis, to examine project proposals submitted to it for financial and other types of assistance.

The session also focused on the important contributions that regional and international organizations and arrangements can make in supporting UN Programme implementation by Arab countries. The benefits of interaction between different organizations was also highlighted (for example, between the Group of Interested States and the League of Arab States).

The session continued with presentations on the issue of **Partnership with Civil Society** and the Role of NGOs in Assistance & Support, including Raising Public Awareness and Mobilizing Public Opinion and Disarmament Education.

Participants noted that the Conference was itself a manifestation of the increasingly close cooperation between States, international organizations and civil society on the small arms issue. It followed a meeting of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Network of civil society organizations in Sana'a, Yemen, which included the participation of the Government of Yemen.

The important role that civil society organizations have to play in raising awareness and educating citizens and local communities on small arms issues was highlighted in the session, as was the contribution that NGOs can make in linking small arms and development. In building peace and promoting development, it was also important to train teachers and future trainers. In these areas and others, NGOs had a crucial role to play in strengthening the dialogue between government and civil society. This was especially important where gaps need to be bridged between the modern state and traditional attitudes and ways of life at the community level—specifically in relation to the illegal possession of weapons by civilians.

The need to involve all parts of the population in the fight against illicit small arms was stressed. This meant, above all, women who, it was noted, often constitute more than fifty percent of the population in post-conflict societies. Participants noted that NGOs could also bring valuable expertise and experience to National Coordination Agencies when included in these bodies as was already the case in some countries.

## **Day Two**

On the second day the Conference addressed **Regional Capacity Building and Regional Cooperation and Assistance**. After having identified Regional Issues and the Regional Impact of International Issues, the speakers discussed Regional Measures.

The importance of cooperative arrangements for effective border management and policing was stressed in this session. Although Arab States have expended considerable effort to control their borders thereby combatting the illicit trafficking of small arms. Several participants noted

that the long, sparsely populated borders shared by many States made this more difficult. Although there was effective customs cooperation in place between many Arab States, there was a need to increase effective bilateral and multilateral cooperation in this important area.

Another key theme of this session was transparency and information sharing. It was noted that the enhanced sharing of information would contribute to building confidence within and among Arab states and also contribute to more positive perceptions of security throughout the region and beyond.

On the issue of Marking, Tracing and Record keeping and illicit brokering as international issues with regional impact, it was noted that the UN General Assembly was currently in the process of adopting resolutions, mandating specific activities to be undertaken in these fields.

The speakers explained how, in each of these areas, interested states were building upon existing provisions of the UN Programme of Action. It was understood that these new initiatives would balance the many legitimate uses of small arms—including for national self-defence—with the need to close important gaps in international control measures.

The morning session ended with presentations on **Existing Regional Mechanisms** and on **Sub Regional Information Networks**.

The speakers described the various initiatives undertaken by the Council of Arab Ministers of Interior on small arms-related matters, mentioning also the Council's determination, expressed at its recent meeting, in 2003, to build on progress made in recent years in enhancing regional coordination in this area.

Although some regional measures exist, participants noted that enforcement was often made difficult by long borders and insufficient capacity in many Arab countries. There was a need to step up region-wide cooperation and coordination on such issues as border management and information exchange. Such coordination could involve the National Points of Contact and National Coordination Agencies, the League of Arab States and other regional and international organizations.

As an initial step, information could be exchanged on national laws and national experience in tackling the small arms problem within the Arab

Region. The importance of existing measures for information sharing within the Gulf Cooperation Council was also highlighted during the session.

The session continued with the issue of **Regional Cooperation and Assistance**, including lessons learnt from the experience of the OSCE and the South Eastern Europe Small Arms Clearing House (SEESAC). The speakers explained the useful role of regional organizations and regional clearing houses in contributing to their respective regions from a political, diplomatic and operational stand point. The support that the United Nations can provide to regional arrangements through the strengthening of cooperation was also emphasized.

The nature and extent of the small arms problem varies considerably in different parts of the world. Each region has its own specificity, creating the need for measures that are tailored to regional circumstances and involve relevant regional organizations. Nevertheless, this session illustrated the many ways that particular regions and organizations can benefit from the experience of other regions and organizations in addressing small arms issues. Many sources of information and expertise can be made available to interested States by the United Nations and others to assist them in responding to their specific problems.

It was noted that practical cooperation between regions across the full range of issues discussed during the Conference—including capacity building—was especially important. Inter-regional cooperation led to a greater understanding of existing needs and available resources. Building the capacity of regional organizations, as well as States, was also important.

Other issues raised by some Conference participants included the potential availability of the OSCE Best Practice Guides in Arabic, and the contribution of the UN Firearms Protocol to the fight against illicit small arms trafficking.

### **Day Three**

The last thematic session of the conference addressed the issue of **Disarmament, Reconstruction and Reconciliation**. It included a presentation of Security Council Resolution 1325 on “Women, Peace and Security”.

During this session, the experiences of Sudan and Somalia were discussed from various angles.

In the ensuing discussion, a point was raised that, important as it is, efforts to fight the illicit trade in SALW were one component of the global arms control and disarmament agenda. The right of self-defence and self-determination, under Article 51 of the UN Charter was also emphasized.

### **Conclusion**

This Conference, a milestone in cooperation between the League of Arab States and the United Nations, has served to underline the multi-dimensional and transnational nature of the illicit trade in SALW in all its aspects. The discussion, throughout the Conference, highlighted the need for a coordinated approach at national, regional and global level. The Conference represents an important step forward in strengthening cooperation between Arab States and relevant partners, both governmental and non-governmental.

Although international organizations and civil society have key roles to play—in partnership with governments—in the fight against the illicit trade in SALW in all its aspects, the primary responsibility for addressing this problem lies with States. In this regard, the Conference has seen Arab States reaffirm their commitment to work diligently within the framework of the UN Programme of Action to prevent, combat and eradicate this major threat to international and regional peace, stability and security.