

Speech given by Ambassador Rafael Ramírez at the Open Debate on Small Arms and Light Weapons at the Security Council on Wednesday 13th May:

Madam President,

Allow me to thank you for calling this important Open Debate. We would also like to thank the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki Moon, and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Husseini, and Mr. Karamoko Diakite for their presentations.

Madam President,

There are no exact figures for the number of Small Arms and Light Weapons currently in circulation worldwide. However, some sources estimate that there are at least 875 million available, many of which are in the hands of individuals and non-state actors. It is considered that between 7 and 8 million of these weapons are produced every year. Legal international sales of weapons and arms, on the other hand, represent at least 8.5 million dollars annually. To this must be added illicit sales that may constitute, according to the World Bank, as much as an additional 20%.

Hundreds of thousands of Small Arms and Light Weapons, including heavy machine guns, grenade launchers, surface-to-air missiles and man-portable air-defence systems, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, rifles and pistols change hands every year on the illicit market and are supplied to non-state actors, including terrorist groups.

The diversion of these weapons exacerbates armed violence, feeds conflicts, civil wars and organised transnational crime, including drug trafficking and trafficking in women, and undermines the respect for international humanitarian law and human rights. At least 508 thousand people die violently every year, including approximately 60 thousand women and girls, in large part the victims of Small Arms and Light Weapons.

These statistics represent the culture and logic of death.

Madam President,

While the illicit circulation of Small Arms and Light Weapons has been a constant for decades in the North of Africa and the Middle East, the latest reports on the subject bear testimony to an unprecedented escalation of this phenomenon throughout the region.

Doubtlessly, military intervention, war and the collapse of institutions in Iraq and Libya, in addition to an escalation of the conflict in Syria are the basic factors behind this dramatic increase in the traffic and flow of Small Arms and Light Weapons throughout the region.

The 2013 United Nations Report of the Secretary General on "Small Arms and Light Weapons" describes the impact that the collapse of the State of Libya has had and the terrible consequences for the security of neighbouring countries. It has been determined that Libyan weapons, ammunition and explosives have ended up in at least 12 countries of the Maghreb, Sahel, Levant and Horn of Africa.

Likewise, the terrible impact that military intervention and the war in Iraq has had on the security of the Middle East has been documented; the collapse of the country's institutions and army has seen a subsequent proliferation of the flow of weapons and explosives of all types.

States can and should, within their capabilities, adequately manage and control their arsenals; promote mechanisms of regional and sub-regional cooperation; mark fire arms at the time of manufacture and import, and forbid the export or transfer of unmarked Small Arms and Light Weapons; penalise illicit traffic and uphold the law. For this reason, the collapse of States and the disappearance of their institutions are a decisive factor in the worsening of the problem under discussion.

The dramatic increase in the flow and illicit traffic in Small Arms and Light Weapons in the North of Africa and the Middle East, with their terrible burden of violence, impunity, crimes against humanity and massive violation of human rights are one of the terrible consequences of political destabilisation, interventionism and the wars in Iraq, Libya and Syria.

Madam President,

In addition to the problem that the collapse of States and institutions in the region represents, another element that we should tackle is the promotion and proliferation of non-state actors as instruments of political destabilisation and the development of war as a mechanism to bring about the downfall of governments.

Many non-state actors in the North of Africa and the Middle East receive Small Arms and Light Weapons from sponsor States. Each weapon that reaches the hands of non-state actors in countries such as Iraq, Libya and Syria feeds barbarity, war, cruelty, suffering and the deaths of innocent people. The boundary, the difference, between non-state actors and terrorist groups is very tenuous; they are armed groups and extremists who act with absolute scorn for life and fundamental human rights who, as they are supplied with all types and quantities of Small Arms and Light Weapons, acquire a significant military capacity and above all the high lethal capacity to take death to all corners of the region.

That is why we are enormously concerned that the large countries who are producers of the Small Arms and Light Weapons in the world have refused to include a prohibition on the transfer of conventional weaponry, including Small Arms and Light Weapons, to non-state actors as a part of the prior negotiations on this issue held in the United Nations, thus leaving a gaping legal void that allows them to continue supplying weapons to their political allies in different parts of the world.

This Security Council has a clear definition of non-state actors, additionally we have a Resolution, number 1540, that creates a valuable precedent in the prohibition of the transfer of weapons of mass destruction to non-state actors, so there are sufficient legal and political elements to achieve an extension of the scope of the prohibition of the sale and traffic in Small Arms and Light Weapons to non-state actors and terrorist groups.

Whoever supplies Small Arms and Light Weapons to non-state actors, whether they be "militias" or "democratic opposition", in countries where there is conflict, that

are at war or undergoing a process of political destabilisation; whoever supplies Small Arms and Light Weapons to non-state actors in whoever's name or for whatever reason, in societies overwhelmed by poverty, inequalities, exclusion or diverse forms of social discrimination, is feeding conflict and creating the conditions for an unthinkable expansion of violence, suffering, and death, as is unfortunately happening nowadays in many brother countries of the Middle East and North of Africa.

Madam President,

It would signify an extraordinary contribution to the conservation of peace, the protection of human rights and the promotion of international law, that this Security Council, as a part of this Open Debate and in view of the situation of humanitarian tragedy, conflict and wars that are devastating the countries of the North of Africa and the Middle East, took a decisive step and made a firm expression of political will, and passed a Resolution that clearly prohibits the sale, supply, traffic or transfer of Small Arms and Light Weapons stipulating non-state actors and terrorist groups. We want to insist on the fact that non-state actors and terrorist groups be included in this prohibition. This aspect cannot be avoided using double standards and excuses. This aspect is very important, because it is these actors who are currently operating with complete impunity and taking chaos, death and suffering to the most vulnerable, to the peoples of the regions scourged by violence. This is a matter of the political will of the countries with greatest responsibility in this problem.

Thank you Madam President.