

Mr. President, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First and foremost, I thank you for the invitation to this meeting and for giving me the floor.

Allow me to begin by giving the delegates a brief history on the Regional Centre on Small Arms (RECSA). Concerned with the persistent problem of the proliferation of illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons, the Nairobi Declaration on the Problem of Illicit Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region was signed on 15th March, 2000 by ten Countries.

This political declaration set in motion for the signing of a legally binding instrument the Nairobi Protocol on the Prevention, Control and Reduction of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region, the Horn of Africa and Bordering States. It was signed in April, 2004 by twelve Member States.

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Convinced that a regional institution with a sole mandate of fighting against Small Arms Proliferation was required to coordinate the implementation of the Nairobi Protocol, RECSA was established in 2005.

The RECSA regional approach success and expertise is demonstrated through achieved results in Small Arms management and control interventions including but not limited to:

1. Establishment of National Institutions for Small Arms Management and Control at Member State level. RECSA has accordingly developed guidelines for Establishment and Functioning of National Institutions Responsible for Small Arms Management and Control;
2. Development of Small Arms National Action Plans to guide implementation of Small Arms interventions and as tools of resource mobilization;
3. Planning and coordinating marking of firearms and electronic record keeping to facilitate identification and reliable tracing. RECSA has distributed 71 marking machines to Member States and firearms marking is ongoing in 11 of its Member states;
4. Planning and coordinating the collection, recording and eventual destruction of excess or obsolete firearms. RECSA has to date

- supported Member States to destroy over 400,000 firearms and over 3000 tons of Unexploded Ordnances;
5. Planning and executing trainings in Weapons and Ammunitions Management (WAM). RECSA has graduated 22 regional instructors, 35 National instructors and trained over 800 personnel in WAM best practices;
 6. Planning and executing safe storage initiatives for Government stockpiles. RECSA has constructed 6 permanent armouries, distributed 6 containerized armouries, distributed 1,600 Safe Storage Steel Boxes and 230 Gun Racks;
 7. Planning and undertaking mind and heart disarmament awareness campaigns well aware that almost 70% of small arms are in the hands of civilians.
 8. Development of WAM practitioners hand book in three languages (English, French and Swahili)
 9. RECSA has also developed a model legislation to guide member states in harmonizing Small Arms legislation in line with regional and international instruments on Small Arms
 10. Coordination of cross border joint simultaneous initiatives to curb cross border trafficking of weapons and related products.
 11. Encouraging Member States to plan and execute public education and awareness campaigns for mind and heart disarmament.

At this juncture, allow me to thank the development partners especially the US Government, The Government of United Kingdom, Norway Government, German Government, Netherlands Government, Japan Government, UNODA, Arms Trade Treaty Secretariat, African Development Bank and the European Union, who have supported RECSA financially in the fight against Small Arms proliferation.

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There are many drivers of proliferation of illicit weapons in the RECSA region, including;

- First, the weak legislative and policy frameworks in many countries; where the legislation on arms management and control is outdated and not harmonized with current realities and the existing Small Arms instruments.
- Second is weak physical security and management of state-held weapons resulting in diversion

- Third is internal political dynamics, where the struggle for political power without following legal means and bad governance may facilitate politically-motivated supply of arms.
- Fourth, ungoverned spaces that drive the demand for illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons by individuals to guard their lives and properties.
- Fifth, economic marginalization which may facilitate youth radicalization and violent extremism which fuel the demand for illegal Weapons.

As a result of the above reasons, over the past two decades, the Great Lakes Region and Horn of Africa have experienced some of the most dangerous armed conflicts in Africa. For example, armed conflicts in DRC, CAR, Burundi, South Sudan, Somalia and Sudan, further illustrate how illicit weapons are a catalyst to conflicts and fragile situations.

Out of the 13 current Global Peace Keeping Operations, 7 are in Africa of which 5 are in the RECSA sub region (South Sudan, CAR, Somalia, Sudan and DRC).

In fact, when we talk of peace operations, we know that we are talking about a situation of illicit armament already. Therefore, the strengthened fight against the proliferation of illicit weapons in its totality would go a long way in reducing the need for peace operations.

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Now let me briefly address the four guiding questions:

Question 1: What are the trends in the illicit circulation, proliferation and misuse of Small Arms in peace operation context and what is the impact of these trends in shaping mandates of the Security Council?

There is no doubt that there is an increasing trend of the illicit circulation and misuse of Small Arms in peace operation context.

Before deployment of peace keepers there is already circulation of illicit small arms and light weapons in the conflict affected areas. We should be asking the sources of the illicit weapons before deployment, so that the mandate of

the UN missions includes undertaking interventions aimed at cutting off the sources of the illicit firearms.

While weapons obtained from peacekeepers may represent a relatively small part of those held by armed groups, further diversions could be reduced by improved weapons management and control in peace keeping operation missions.

Question 2: What specific measures can the Security Council take in preventing weapons in possession of peace keepers from getting into the hands of illicit armed groups, including in relation to its work on arms embargoes, DDR, SSR and countering terrorism?

The measures to be taken by the UN Security Council revolve around the concept of “Arms management and control” in peace keeping operations. Arms management and control whether in conflict affected or fragile situation or not, has three major objectives of:

1. Improving physical security to curb diversion,
2. Improving safety to reduce risks of unintended explosions,
3. Accountability to know the exact numbers for easy detection of leakage and taking appropriate actions.

Therefore, before and during deployment of peace keepers the following are the suggested measures:

1. Training in Weapons and Ammunitions Management before deployment of peace keepers
2. Marking and electronic record keeping of all weapons to be used in the mission before deployment
3. Continued accountability measures for all mission stockpiles
4. Effective management or destruction of all collected small arms and light Weapons during DDR
5. Continued public awareness of the masses in conflict areas on the bad effects of small arms proliferation.

Question 3: How can United Nations Peace Operations support enhanced weapons and ammunition management? What existing tools and mechanisms are available to this end? Are there gaps that need addressing?

As already said, enhanced weapons and ammunitions management is all about interventions that are aimed at curbing diversion.

While the UN Peace Operations technical support to local Law Enforcement Agencies in mission is paramount to enhance weapons management, the inclusion of weapons management training component during troops pre-deployment is highly recommended.

The tools and mechanisms are already in place. At the international level we have the UNPoA, International Tracing Instrument, Arms Trade Treaty while at the continental level we have the Bamako declaration and AU Silencing the Guns Initiative and at the sub regional level we have the Nairobi Protocol.

The major gaps to be addressed are: the need to domesticate the existing Small Arms control instruments within the national legislation, availing adequate human and financial resources to implement them. Above all, there is need for coordination of all the efforts by the different stakeholders spearheaded by the National Institution responsible for Small Arms Management and control.

In this regard, RECSA's expertise and experience can be exploited to spearhead the fight against Small Arms proliferation on the African continent

Question 4: What Regional or Global mechanisms can be developed/strengthened to strengthen the control of small arms and light weapons in conflict affected situations.

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The management of small arms and light weapons calls for the actual implementation of the existing mechanisms, globally at UN level, continentally at AU level and regionally at RECSA level. The mechanisms are there but they face challenges.

It is important to recognize that Small Arms proliferation is a development issue. There is need for; enhanced coordination among stakeholders to avoid duplication and adequate funding of Small Arms management and control interventions.

Arms control programming is not a stand-alone issue. It is closely linked to poverty reduction and sustainable development goals. Therefore, it's vital to package arms control interventions within the wider development programming as there is a nexus between sustainable development and security.

Even with the threats from climate change and COVID-19 pandemic, let's not forget that arms proliferation is a worse catalyst that can bring communities and economies to a standstill.

Peace Operations relates to full blown conflict with formal warring parties but Small Arms proliferation goes beyond this context to lower level transnational organized armed crime which affects human security. That is why it is important to support RECSA in its mandate.

The opportunity of having a fully-fledged intergovernmental organization whose sole mandate is on the fight against Small Arms proliferation as a specialized agency should be exploited by the UN Security Council.

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In conclusion, Arms proliferation therefore covers production, transfer, possession and use without authorization of a competent authority. Suffice to note that it remains the main catalyst of armed conflicts in Africa. The fight against weapons trafficking and misuse cannot be won in boardrooms but requires concrete and practical interventions which addresses the drivers of proliferation of weapons.

Thank you for your kind attention!