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INTERVENTO DEL CAPO DELLA DELEGAZIONE DELLA SANTA SEDE ALLA CONFERENZA INTERNAZIONALE SUL TRAFFICO ILLEGALE DELLE ARMI LEGGERE

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Pubblichiamo di seguito l'intervento che il Capo della Delegazione della Santa Sede, Mons. Celestino Migliore, Sotto-Segretario per i Rapporti con gli Stati, ha pronunciato ieri alla Conferenza Internazionale sul traffico illegale delle armi leggere, in corso a New York dal 9 al 20 luglio 2001:

Mr. President,

Since there is a close relationship between weapons and violence, weapons and destruction, weapons and hatred coupled with social disintegration, arms cannot be treated simply like commercial goods. This troubling statement alone serves to guide the work of the present *International Conference on Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspects*, at which I have the honour to represent the Holy See.

It is clear from the outset that the ethical, social and humanitarian importance of the topic under discussion cannot be separated from, but, in fact, must serve as the framework for any consideration of the supply and demand of small arms and light weapons for security, political and economic reasons.

For certain types of weapons, such as anti-personnel mines, it has been possible to devise a Convention that prohibits their use, stockpiling, production and transfer; and for other types of weapons, such as certain conventional ones which may be deemed to be excessively injurious or to have indiscriminate effects, there exists a UN Convention prohibiting or restricting their use. Nevertheless, it is well known that small arms and light weapons are the primary weapons used in conflicts of every kind throughout the world.

Unfortunately, however, it is impossible to ban all kinds of small arms and light weapons. "In a world marked by evil ... the right of legitimate defence by means of arms exists. This right can become a serious duty for those who are responsible for the lives of others, for the common good of the family or of the civil community. This right alone can justify the possession or transfer of arms". (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, "The International Arms Trade: an Ethical Reflection" in *Origins* 8 (24), 7 July 1994, p. 144).

This is not an absolute right, since there are specific conditions placed on the licitness of the production, possession and acquisition of arms. Nonetheless, in our meeting today the topic is fairly limited. Here we are discussing illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. This is, in a manner of speaking, a negative statement of the fundamental question of the legitimacy of the international arms trade.

The present Conference puts on the table various concrete measures intended to address the problem of the above-mentioned illicit trade, as well as to avoid diverting small arms and light weapons into the illegal market. Of particular significance are the mechanisms for prevention, reduction, accountability and control, such as the creation of systems of marking, tracing, and record-keeping; the defining of criteria for the export of arms or for determining when there is effectively a surplus; the regulation of brokering activity; the inclusion of mechanisms for collecting and destroying arms in peace processes; the establishment of adequate standards for the management and security of the stocks of these weapons; and, taking into account the issue of demand of illicit traffic of small arms and light weapons, the implementation of educational and awareness activities aimed at promoting a culture of peace and life, through, among other things, the involvement of different protagonists in the civil society.

The Holy See applauds this political desire and offers its full support and cooperation, and it hopes that concrete results will be reached as quickly as possible.

Without a doubt, in this initial phase we are on the threshold of a new and, perhaps, long process in the area of arms control. The present International Conference is an essential step, offering as it does an important opportunity to broaden the scope of both the international debate and public awareness in order to mobilize a political will and to establish and strengthen norms and measures aimed at preventing and combating this phenomenon.

While on other fronts the process of disarmament seems to be taking its time, if not even treading down backward paths, this new approach aimed at illicit trade in small arms and light weapons stands out as a sign of hope. This process presents us once more with a fundamental step to take, one which consists in a precise and decisive change in international relations, which must be based not on the rule of the strongest and of those who are best prepared militarily, but on the force of law and according to standards and instruments capable of guaranteeing security independently of recourse to violence.

This means that actions must be based on the complex social and economic conditions that are at the root of the supply and demand of these arms, and must promote a true culture of peace and life. Such an approach is also directed against the culture of violence fed by, among other things, the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons, which sometimes could be wrongly recognised as one of the more effective instruments to solve the conflicts of daily life.

The ultimate goal uniting us in this area is the protection of the life and dignity of each and every human person. For this reason, it seems appropriate to ensure, even in this process, the centrality of the human person, and therefore to emphasize the importance of considering the human dimension in facing the problem of illicit trade in arms. It is well known that civil populations suffer the most tragic consequences from the use of light weapons and small arms; the majority of the victims of these arms are civilians, most of which are women and children.

Children in particular suffer a twofold evil effect, since on the one hand they are passively exposed to the dangers of these arms and on the other they play an active part in conflicts when they are forced into the reprehensible role of child-soldiers. My delegation deems it also important to emphasize here how such situations demand strong action on the part of the international community, which must show particular concern for children affected by conflict situations in various regions of the world, and must work to reunite them with their families and reintegrate them into society by appropriate means of rehabilitation.

Mr. President,

We are all aware that, in terms of political and economic realism, those who engage in the illicit trade of arms, as

well as warlords and armed bands with terrorist or criminal intentions, have little to gain from a specific international arms agreement. Moreover, it is sad to note that solidarity with the victims of the use of small arms and light weapons - which are in fact arms of mass destruction against the poor - is not always considered a high priority.

My delegation, therefore, is well aware that our discussion takes on a wide-ranging dimension, an eloquently human dimension which places before us a choice between national or corporate interest and a culture of peace and solidarity. As Pope John Paul II affirmed in his Message for the World Day of Peace at the beginning of this year, "The culture of solidarity is closely connected with the value of peace... The alarming increase of arms runs the risk of feeding and expanding a culture of competition and conflict, a culture involving not only States but also non-institutional entities, such as paramilitary groups and terrorist organizations ... Faced with such threats, everyone must feel the moral duty to take concrete and timely steps to promote the cause of peace and understanding among peoples".

Thank you, Mr. President.

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