Eighth Biennial Meeting of States on the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects

June 29, 2022, 10:00-13:00 EDT

Your Excellencies, Honourable Parliamentarians, ladies and gentlemen, it is an honour to greet you on behalf of the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons (the Forum). My name is Karin Olofsson and I am the Secretary General of the Forum.

Let me begin by expressing our delight that this meeting is being realised in-person for the first time since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and our gratitude to all attending the event. It gives hope that we are now coming together, despite the continued difficult challenges faced by societies worldwide in the wake of the global pandemic. I would also like to express heartfelt gratitude to the Chair of this meeting, His Excellency Mr. Enrique Manalo, the United Nations Office on Disarmament Affairs and the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) for considering this statement.

The Forum is the only membership-based organisation gathering parliamentarians globally across party-political lines, to specifically reduce and prevent Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)-related violence.

The state of the world, marked by violence and conflict, underlines the need to prioritise the prevention of armed violence. According to the Small Arms Survey, more than 1 billion SALW are circulating worldwide causing the death of over 223 300 people every year. Armed conflicts and violence, independent of their scale, are perpetuated by the uncontrolled availability of SALW, highlighting the need for effective steps to tackle its proliferation.

The continued economic, political and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrate that the widespread availability of SALW hinders efforts to provide development support to the most vulnerable. The UN has stated an increase in domestic violence of approximately 30% since the outbreak of the pandemic, where domestic violence is further intensified by the presence of firearms according to UNDP in South East Europe. It underscores the interconnectedness of societal challenges and the importance of a gender equality perspective in disarmament processes.

Members of Parliament play a central role in preventing SALW-related violence in view of their legislative, oversight and awareness-raising roles, by bridging the gap between international arms control instruments and the regional and national implementation levels.
However, parliamentary involvement in the aforementioned international processes is generally neglected, which means the potential of parliamentary action in contributing to more peaceful societies is lost. A main conclusion from the Forum’s recent regional seminars in Southeast Asia and Africa, is that parliamentarians generally lack sufficient knowledge about relevant international instruments and that the instruments must be made more accessible, including by translation to local languages, as to further underpin political will. Therefore, the Forum emphasises continued active parliamentary involvement related to the UN PoA and its synergies with other relevant instruments, and we are delighted to bring the parliamentary perspective to BMS8 at the side event hosted by the Forum, with sponsorship from Sweden, on June 30. Parliamentary recommendations on actions for enhanced implementation of the UN PoA, Women, Peace and Security and the 2030 Agendas will be highlighted at the event, following conclusions from parliamentarians in Southeast Asia and Africa.

To conclude; actively including parliamentarians enable more democratic policy discussion and inclusive decision-making processes, contributing to more peaceful and sustainably developed societies. We encourage all states to consider parliamentary involvement in their work related to the UN PoA, as well as the synergies with other relevant SALW control instruments.

It is crucial that all relevant stakeholders join forces to prevent the uncontrolled availability of SALW, for the security, rights and well-being of every child, woman and man. Thank you!