Eighth Biennial Meeting of States

UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects

Statement of the World Forum on Shooting Activities

Mr. Chairman, thank you for affording me the opportunity to address this body. My name is Graham Downing and I am the President of the World Forum on Shooting Activities – the WFSA.

The WFSA is an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations representing more than 50 member associations across the world and hundreds of millions of lawful civilian firearms owners. We and our member associations have been attending UN meetings for over 20 years and we have great experience when it comes to small arms and light weapons matters.

I was elected to this position only in March of this year and this is therefore my first opportunity to attend a meeting of the Programme of Action in this role. Accordingly, I look forward not only to the opportunity to share both my own and my organisation’s collective experience and expertise with you, but also to the chance to observe how the PoA operates under the principle of unanimous consent.

Working by unanimous consent is of particular importance. It requires all parties to be allowed to exchange views, to share expertise and then to reach conclusions that are mutually acceptable across a wide range of interests. Only when mutual acceptability is established will all parties be prepared to comply with the agreed principles. Without compliance, an agreement is of little or no value.

In preparing for this meeting, I not only reviewed the Draft final reports, but also researched the compliance and implementation rates for the principles and consensual provisions of the PoA. It is no secret that these fall far short of 100%. I have noted with some concern the proposals for expansion of the PoA, such as through the creation of an open-ended technical expert group, even though the PoA provisions have still not been implemented by all State Parties. As I hinted earlier, it is fundamental to achieve consensus and compliance with the key provisions before moving forward with any proposals for expansion.

Mr. Chairman, our civilian hunting and sport shooting activities enjoy huge popularity across the world. They are safely conducted and as responsible sporting and trade associations and governing bodies we share the concerns of State Governments and law enforcement to ensure that the firearms we use do not fall into the wrong hands. After over twenty years of UN efforts on small arms and light weapons, there is still a reluctance to acknowledge that a very large proportion of firearms across the world are held by responsible civilians for the purposes of hunting, sport shooting, collecting and other lawful purposes. Looking at those current areas of unrest and war it is evident that these firearms, legally owned by law-abiding citizens, are neither involved in nor contributing to these conflicts.

At national level, our member associations work closely with Government to prevent diversion of firearms into the hands of criminals and terrorists. The same applies at international level, and it is therefore the illegal possession of firearms and the illicit transfer of military small arms upon which the
UN should focus. There is no reason whatever that the lawful and peaceable activities of our members should be impacted upon by UN regulation.

Nonetheless, our sporting and industry bodies represented within the WFSA are willing to support the United Nations in its efforts with all the expertise and experience which they can provide on many of the technological issues which concern the PoA. They can answer your questions about marking, tracing, and record keeping, along with any queries you might have about polymer or modular weapons. I urge you, Mr Chairman, to make use of this valuable resource. While I personally might not have all the answers for you, someone within my organisation will surely do so. I am sure that you wish to strengthen cooperation, just as we do, so please reach out to us.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.