



CAMEROON YOUTHS AND STUDENTS FORUM FOR PEACE CAMYOSFOP

Yaoundé, June 12, 2009

Press Statement

Press conference on Cameroon's Contribution to the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)

Men and women of the press,
Distinguished invitees

On behalf of the Cameroon Youths and Students Forum for Peace (CAMYOSFOP), I wish to welcome you to this event on the commemoration of the 2009 Global Week of Action Against the illicit proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). It is close to a decade since the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (UNPoA), was adopted in July 2001 by the member states of the UN. This agreement stands as the central global agreement on preventing, combating and reducing illicit trafficking, proliferation and misuse of SALW, an urgent global problem that contributes to thousands of deaths each week and to human suffering and insecurity across the world.

2009 marks the sixth year that CAMYOSFOP has been organising and coordinating activities to raise awareness on the impact of the illicit proliferation and misuse of SALW in Cameroon. These activities that are coordinated by the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) complements the UN Program of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its aspects (UNPoA).

According to the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) and the Control Arms, more than 350.000 civilians die each year on average from the misuse of SALW. Today, there are about 640 million SALW in the world. That is, one for every ten persons on earth. Whereas eight million weapons are produced every year by at least 1135 companies in 98 countries, 10 to 14 billion of ammunition are manufactured every year. This is enough to kill every person in the world twice over. With less than FCFA 50.000 (US \$ 100), anyone could have access to them.

It is estimated that more than 2 millions of these weapons circulate in the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC), with about 9 millions in the entire sub region of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). The following percentages of these weapons in ECCAS are: civilians 79%, rebels 2%, the military 16% and the police 3%.

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Like in many other parts of the world, the illicit proliferation of SALW in Cameroon is complex. The simple reason is that it is difficult to determine the exact amount of the production, distribution and circulation of such arms in the country since no statistics exist on them. Due to the loopholes in the law relating to these weapons, there is still a lot of ignorance about small arms and their misuse by those who possess them. Also, because of the porosity of the frontiers of Cameroon that permit the infiltration of these weapons by arms traffickers and laxity in the law of production of Den guns by local blacksmiths, it is an established fact that the number of these arms in circulation in Cameroon is enormous. The consequences of the illicit proliferation of such weapons are many, among them the rampant Highway robberies or 'coupeurs de route,' inter-tribal armed conflicts, and the crime wave in the cities that have steadily become a major threat to the peace, security and development of Cameroon in a turbulent Central-African Sub Region. Cameroon presently host about 40.000 refugees from the neighbouring countries of Chad and Central Africa Republic. The impact of the illicit proliferation and misuse of these weapons in Cameroon are too great to be ignored.

Testifying to the accessibility and misuse of SALW, Kofi Annan, the former Secretary General of the UN, had this to say during an open debate at the UN Security Council on August 2, 2001:

Small arms are easy to buy, easy to use, easy to transport and easy to conceal. Their proliferation exacerbates conflicts, spawns a culture of violence and impunity. This is not just a question of disarmament; it is also an issue of development, democracy, human rights and human security. ... The target remains unscrupulous arms brokers, corrupt government officials, drug trafficking syndicates, terrorists, armed groups and others who bring death and may hem into our streets, schools and towns and who ruin lives and destroy in minutes the labour of years. No country is immune from this threat. There are no simple solutions and there is no single method of dealing with weapons.¹

Equally, during the Millennium Declaration he declared to the 192 Heads of State and Government of the world that:

The proliferation of small arms is not only a security issue but also a human rights and development issue. The proliferation of small arms supports and aggravates armed conflicts. They put in danger, agents for the maintenance of peace and humanitarian workers. They fragilize the respect of international humanitarian law. They put in danger the legitimacy of weak governments and profit terrorists and other organized crimes.²

Progress in the putting in place of an Arms Trade Treaty by the UN:

A wave of optimism overtook the UN small arms process in July, when progress on implementing the 2001 Programme of Action on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms received new momentum. As such, on December 6, 2006 an overwhelming majority vote of 153 member states of the General Assembly led to the adoption of Resolution 61/89 for the putting in place of an Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). In 2008 134 states voted to adopt a final outcome document outlining actions to be

¹ UN, Program of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspects (UNPoA), New York, August, 2001, pp., 28-29.

² Kofi A. Annan, "Millennium Declaration, 2000."

undertaken by all states with only the US and Zimbabwe voting against. There was yet more success at the UN with the global campaign for an Arms Trade Treaty. The First Committee on disarmament voted overwhelmingly in October to move forward with the work on an ATT. 147 states voted yes to an Open-Ended working Group which will meet for six sessions, beginning in early 2009. An overwhelming majority of states also supported the small arms 'Omnibus' resolution at First Committee. This resolution sets the schedule of UN small arms meetings for the next 6 years: a Biennial Meeting of States in 2010, an Expert meeting in 2011 and a Review Conference in 2012.

Cameroon's Contribution to the ATT Process:

Cameroon's contribution has come from both the government and the CSO, particularly the CAMYOSFOP.

The government of Cameroon has been at every front of the ATT process by sponsoring the process in 2006 and in October 2008. Despite the existing Cameroon law (Decree No 73/658 of 22 October 1973) on firearms, some of the measures put in place by the Government since 2000 to fight against criminality, traffic in arms and the use of illicit SALW, include: the creation of specialised police and military units including. the Groupement Special d'Operation des Police (GSO) or Special Police Operation Unit; Groupement Polyvalent d'Intervention de la Gendarmerie National (GPIGN) or National Gendarmerie Multi-dimensional Intervention Unit; and the Bataillon d'Intervention Rapide (BIR) or military Rapid Intervention Unit. These measures by the government complement the UNPoA and the ATT.

As concerns CAMYOSFOP, in April 2005, we were incorporated into the Control Arms Steering Committee that drafted the global principles of the ATT. Equally in 2005 and 2006 we actively participated in the Million Face Campaign by collecting signatures of Cameroonians to support the ATT. These signatures of the peoples of the world were presented to the Secretary General of the United Nations during the UN Small Arms Review Conference that was held in July 2006. The impact of these signatures is that, five months after the Review Conference, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 61/89 putting in place the process of an Arms Trade Treaty. In 2007 CAMYOSFOP was part of the people's consultation that mobilised Cameroonians on the importance of an ATT. Over 100 events and messages from around the world showed there is a vast support from ordinary people to be protected from armed violence resulting from the irresponsible arms trade. In 2008 CAMYOSFOP also worked with Cameroonian Members of Parliament who signed the Parliamentary Declaration that endorse the UN First Committee on disarmament to move forward with work on the ATT. In October 2008, CAMYOSFOP was among the Control Arms campaigners that raced around all 192 national missions in New York in 192 minutes to deliver a personal message from Desmond Tutu, highlighting the urgent need for states

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to vote Yes during the First Committee on Disarmament. During the past months we have been able to work with the Ministry of External Relations on Cameroon's submission on Arms Violence and Development and the participation of Cameroon in the Open-Ended Working Group Expert meeting that will hold from July 13 – 17, 2009. CAMYOSFOP has kept the momentum by working with Cameroon Members of Parliament and the Ministry of External Relations, on the need to fully endorse the ATT and reform the law binding these weapons in Cameroon.

Conclusion:

It is imperative for the member states of the UN to support the putting in place of an instrument that will be able to regulate the production, sales, and use of arms in the world. An effective Arms Trade Treaty will be able to enhance peace, security and development in most countries of the world. The fact that Cameroon is one of the most peaceful in Central Africa; she is well place to spearhead this process in the sub region. CAMYOSFOP and other CSOs working on the sector commit themselves to continue supporting the government in this process.

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For more information about the Week of Action worldwide, visit www.iansa.org