

RADIO NEWS COMMENTARY

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GLOBAL WEEK OF ACTION TO CONTROL SMALL ARMS

For the past three (3) years precisely the first week of June every year, activities have been held across the globe by anti-gun campaigners to highlight the disastrous consequences and effects of the abuse of small arms by both state and non state actors.

The Ghana National Commission on Small Arms(**GNACSA**) in collaboration with the Ghana Action Network on Small Arms (**GHANSA**), a coalition of civil society organisations working against small arms proliferation and mis-use in the country have initiated several activities, especially media awareness and public sensitisation programmes in the Greater Accra, Volta, Western and Northern regions.

Several countries across the globe are observing the week and responding to the call by the International Action Network on Small Arms (**IANSA**) to gather support for the global control of small arms. The relevance of the week is to build up momentum leading to the crucial meetings on regulating the Small Arms trade in Bamako, Niamey and New York this year. Member states of the United Nations would be reviewing the impact of the United Nations Programme of Action on Illicit Trade in Small Arms in All Its Aspects (**UNPoA**) and the proposed UN Arms Trade Treaty (**ATT**).

The government of Ghana has shown great commitment over the years in pursuing a formidable and binding small arms control policies and programmes both at home and the ECOWAS sub-region. As we continue relentlessly as a nation to draw support for the Global control of small arms, it is important that we recognise the contributions and commitment of the ECOWAS member states who have consistently pursued policies to realise the dream of a regional control instrument to replace the over nine (9) years old Moratorium on Small Arms and Light Weapons (**SALW**) by a Convention.

The high level of poverty in the ECOWAS sub-region can be attributed in part to the numerous conflicts that have engulfed the region in the past two decades. Yes, small arms were used in all these conflicts. With the return of relative calm to the once very volatile Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'ivoire and quite recently the Dagbon area, they have remained the biggest threat to the peace and security of the sub-region. These arms might have gone silent and in coma, the fact still remains that the evil forces against development have suddenly revived the arms to perpetrate economic and social crimes. The manifestation of the latest twist in the mis-use of these arms are evident in the daily occurrences of armed banditry and seldom mis-use by security agencies mandated to protect life and property.

As a country, we are at a crossroad where peace loving citizens are confronted by the dangers posed by armed chieftaincy and land, political and ethnic disputes, armed highway and domestic robberies as well as mis-identity by some security agencies to shoot and kill

innocent people. Sadly, the very recent attacks on our police by armed robbers at Taifa and the accidental killings of unarmed civilians at Dansoman and Kotobabi by the police are vivid reminders that a lot still remains to be done to assure citizens of the needed peace and security. In all these instances small arms be they locally manufactured or imported are used.

The decision and responsibility does not only lay in government but also all citizens and residents to decide whether to continue to allow small arms to thwart and erode the gains made in ensuring peace and security, economic and social development and the hope for a better prosperous and peaceful country, sub-region, continent and world.

The fight to control small arms and light weapons is the collective responsibility of all, unfortunately when blames are leveled; they are quickly directed at the police without questioning the role and contributions we as citizens have made in the provision of information, moral and material support to help the police perform creditably and effectively their lawful duties. Often, we forget that the security services especially the police are potential and in most cases victims of the abuse of these uncontrolled arms.

Efforts at controlling the small arms menace would be fruitless unless we develop strong individual, community, national, regional and international regulations. Fortunately for Ghana and the sub-region, the climax and observance of this year's Global Week of Action on Small Arms Campaign coincides with the review of the ECOWAS Draft Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons and series of important meetings by ECOWAS Member States to launch the ECOWAS Small Arms Control Project (**ECOSAP**) in Bamako. There is no better time than now for all to join hands with **GHANSA** to support the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons and the International Arms Trade Treaty (**ATT**) the only initiative that would bring peace and development to our world. We hope that the Ghana delegation to Bamako would push for a strong ECOWAS Convention that would plug all the dubious routes through which small arms are smuggled into our country. Support the Control Arms campaign.

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