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Press Release

GLOBAL GUN CRISIS CALLS FOR UN ACTION

Dated; Guwahati the 28th May, 2006. Small Arms and Light Weapons represent an epidemic and calls for urgent action. According to the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) small arms account for 1000 deaths every day in the world besides causing injury to another 3000 persons. This came to light at the seminar held today on "UN Review Conference on Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons" being held at the Department of Law, Gauhati University under the auspices of Citizens Collective and the Department of Law.

The Seminar inaugurated by Justice S.N.Phukan, Chairperson, Assam Human Rights Commission was participated by judges, advocates, media persons, members of the civil society, academicians and students. According to Justice Phukan, production and trade in small arms and light weapons have made the world realize the devastation and mass destruction heaped on innocent civilians. Manufactured and produced by over 1200 companies in over 90 countries these weapons produce pernicious effects on economic development and put enormous strain on scarce public health resources. While wars account for 25 percent deaths from such arms and weapons, criminal homicides and suicides account for 56 percent and 14 percent of fatal casualties respectively.

Justice Phukan, therefore emphasized the necessity of building up an effective momentum by all concerned at the forthcoming UN Review Conference on Small Arms due next month. Justice A. H. Saikia, Judge Gauhati High Court, participating as the Guest of Honour, spoke on the devastation wrought by small arms since early civilization. He lamented that trade in small arms mostly affect third world countries and strongly urged the participants to draw the attention of the international meet for adoption of urgent action to protect humanity from such miseries. He stated that trade in small arms can be termed as arms dollars and stated that it can be considered with that of business interest groups involved in petro dollars and narco dollars. Earlier Mr A.K. Goldsmith of Citizens Collective in his introductory address analysed the developments leading to the adoption of the Programme of Action in 2001. Professor N.Sanjaoba, Dean, Faculty of Law, Gauhati University in the course of his presidential remarks expressed the need for hammering out a binding convention taking into consideration the interests of National Liberation Movements as well as United Nations General Resolutions on the matter. The discussions were earlier set in motion by remarks from Professor D.N. Choudhury.

Addressing the open session Dr A. K. Sinha, Director, Forensic Science, Assam made a clear distinction between legal and illegal use of small arms besides elaborating on various humanitarian and technical aspects of such arms and weapons. The effectiveness and limitations of the UN Programme of Action was highlighted by Dr Subhram Rajkhowa of Citizens Collective, apart from informing the participants on the current developments concerning the ensuing review conference as well on the developments taking place in India and abroad during the current Global Week of Action that is being organized in over 50 countries worldwide. He also mentioned of the diverse adverse affects of small arms, including that on children and human rights. Dr Romesh Barpatra Gohain, another resource person dwelt on the humanitarian aspects and criticized the role of the government of India as well as that of the State government for their failures in the relevant front. He lamented the assassins of Parag Kuman Das who was shot dead in broad daylight was yet to be punished even after a decade. Dr Jaharal Sarkar while

moderating the session stressed upon the need for adopting an effective balance to eliminate misuse of small arms.

The open house discussion was initiated by Dr S. Kanaujna wherein Dr Aparajita Barua spoke at length on various UN instruments particularly pertaining to children who happen to be the worst sufferers of small arms.

Various participants including Professors B.C.Das and Pradip Kumar Goswami deliberated on important aspects of the seminar.

The participants endorsed and adopted the following resolutions for transmission to the appropriate forums.

*Need for adoption of Global standards to regulate the international transfer of weapons.

*Need for effective regulation of guns in the hands of civilian population.

*Need for incorporation of armed violence prevention into development projects for funding.

*Providing assistance for survivors of armed violence.

*Need for States to support efforts aimed at developing an international instrument to enable states to identify and trace in a timely and realistic manner, illicit small arms and light weapons.

Subhram Rajkhowa