

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Thank you Mr Chairman,

I am Widad Akrawi, a geneticist by profession and serve as President of Defend International, an NGO that advocates for human rights in the Middle East and North Africa region. I am a member of IANSA and part of the Control Arms campaign.

Mr Chairman,

Death and injury caused by armed violence is one of the most shameful epidemics of our age.

The irresponsible transfer of conventional arms around the planet has destroyed millions of lives and livelihoods, and seriously violated the fundamental human rights of many more.

Like me, some of you may have grown up in a country where the misuse of guns was a constant threat.

Even today in some countries, such as parts of Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, when you drop your children off at school on your way to work in the morning, you cannot feel sure that all of you will still be alive at dinnertime.

During this First Committee, States have a historic opportunity to address the poorly regulated trade in small arms, which facilitates so much terror and violence.

Two years ago, the First Committee voted overwhelmingly to begin work on the Arms Trade Treaty.

Mr Chairman, there are some who believe the Arms Trade Treaty is a European concept. In fact, since the early days when Cambodia, Costa Rica and Mali began to promote the idea for an ATT, more than 100 countries have joined them. The majority of those countries are in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia – the regions where irresponsible arms transfers have had the most devastating consequences.

When the Secretary General called for states to send him their views on an ATT, the submissions showed that the majority of States want: (1) a legally binding Treaty, and (2) one that will prevent the transfers of weapons likely to be used in serious violations of human rights law.

Mr Chairman, some States are concerned that a treaty based on human rights could be applied subjectively to prevent them from receiving the weapons they need for legitimate security purposes.

However, the concepts of human rights and international humanitarian law are objectively defined in many international agreements. Through the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and numerous other instruments, all UN member states have already agreed on international human rights standards. So human rights is **NOT** a subjective concept.

In their submissions to the Secretary General, the States stressed the need for clear guidelines to define the term ‘**serious violations of human rights law**’, and on how to assess the risk of whether a specific proposed transfer will contribute to such violations. We in civil society strongly support that recommendation from Member States.

Member States now have the opportunity to advance the process towards an ATT – by supporting the resolution to establish an Open-Ended Working Group.

Some States have expressed concerns about what is missing from this resolution. For example, the resolution does not explicitly put human rights law, international humanitarian law and sustainable development at the centre of the Open Ended Working Group's deliberations.

We NGOs share these concerns about what is missing. **The truth is – we wanted a much stronger resolution than this.**

But at least this resolution will create a forum for further discussion and clarification, so that work can continue towards a strong and effective ATT.

The adoption of the resolution will mean that within 3 months, the next phase of work towards an ATT will begin. All States will be part of the Open Ended Working Group, and we understand there will also be regional meetings to complement it.

We urge all States to bring to the Open Ended Working Group – and to the regional meetings – the concerns and priorities which they have expressed, in their submissions to the Secretary General and in discussions of this resolution.

We hope this next phase of work will produce a concrete result, reflecting the demand of the majority of states – and of civil society – for a strong and effective, legally binding ATT.

I'd like to share an example of why we urgently need an effective Arms Trade Treaty.

Somalia is an example of a country where serious violations of both international human rights and international humanitarian law have been part of the conflict. Thousands of civilians have been killed and hundreds of thousands are internally displaced. Over 300,000 new refugees fled the country last year.

The UN has declared an arms embargo, and yet weapons continue to flow into the country.

One of the many displaced Somalis told of the impact these weapons have had. Her house was hit by artillery shells on 1 November 2007. This woman's sister was killed, and also eight of her children. She saw pieces of her sister's body scattered. That was also the last time she saw her husband. He had arrived home after the shelling, asked from which direction it came, and then ran from the house.

This story is not unique. People around the world in countries affected by conflict or crime can testify to the human suffering caused by the proliferation and misuse of weapons.

The States through which these weapons transit to such conflict zones have inadequate national legislation and procedures. Arms traffickers exploit these loopholes.

An Arms Trade Treaty would require all States to adopt the same high standards of controls. It would also increase the responsibility on the original supplier states to prevent diversion.

Most importantly, a strong ATT will prevent such tragedies as the one suffered by this Somali victim.

Thank you Mr Chairman.