

## **Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime**

### **Item 2(b) Expert consultations on the marking of firearms, the keeping of records on firearms, trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunitions and the identification of competent authorities**

#### **Statement by International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA)**

**Dr Alun Howard, 14 October 2008**

Thank you, Madam Chair

The International Action Network on Small Arms is a network of over 800 civil society organisations in 120 countries. Our members are development organisations, faith groups, human rights campaigners, women's groups and researchers. Many are also survivors of firearm violence, or organisations working with survivors. An estimated million people are shot every year, which gives an indication of the scale of the problem, and the need for urgent action.

Madam Chair, the Firearms Protocol remains the only global binding instrument on gun violence prevention, and it has led the way for other global and regional initiatives. The UN Programme of Action on Small Arms is the prime example, and as a result of the Programme, around 50 States have established National Commissions on small arms. These National Commissions should contain representatives from every relevant government department, and so should also be responsible for implementing the Firearms Protocol.

At the regional level, there have been many initiatives on small arms control, such as the Nairobi Protocol on Small Arms, the OSCE Best Practice Guidelines on Small Arms and the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms. Most of these initiatives have built upon the foundations of the Protocol, and some of them have been able to address issues that are not covered by the Protocol. In particular, the recent UN discussions on an Arms Trade Treaty have focussed on regulating State-to-State transfers of weapons. This issue is explicitly removed from the scope of the Firearms Protocol in Article 4, paragraph 2.

Even with exceptions, the Protocol is a useful tool in preventing firearm violence, by helping to prevent diversion of privately-possessed firearms to irresponsible users. It provides the foundations for effective action, especially in marking, record-keeping and tracing. As the legislative guides of the UN Office for Drugs and Crime suggest, there is nothing to stop States going further than the provisions of the Protocol, in order to benefit from 7 years of international experience since the Protocol was agreed.

I want to focus on one aspect of the Protocol under discussion here today: the provisions on record-keeping. Many States maintain paper records of firearms transfers and possession. This makes it extremely difficult for the police to effectively trace a specific firearm. Even if the weapon is fully identified and marked, they

cannot easily find whether it was legally transferred or possessed within their jurisdiction. They would need to check the paper records, and these are rarely organised by firearm serial number.

This is a problem that even affects many industrialised countries, where the old paper records have not yet been computerised. The problem is especially acute in poorer States, who would benefit from technical and financial assistance to implement this aspect of the Protocol.

Computerised registration can have a dramatic impact on firearm crime and trafficking, as part of a comprehensive package. Brazil provides a striking recent example.

Firearm deaths in Brazil had been rising steadily for 15 years, but after a new gun law in 2003, the pattern changed to a downward trend. The data show that around 24,000 lives have been saved in the 3 years 2003-2006. This has been achieved by a comprehensive program of preventative measures, including a central computerised firearms register and marking of all firearms and ammunition cartridges.

Civil society played a vital role in the Brazilian success. Government-civil society cooperation is explicitly mandated by the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms, and a majority of National Commissions include civil society members. The resulting success should be a model for the implementation of this Convention and its Protocols.

Madam Chair, the Firearms Protocol can play an essential part in reducing firearms crime, but only if it is adequately implemented. We urgently need a monitoring mechanism for the Convention and ALL of its Protocols. With guns killing 1000 people every day around the world, firearms trafficking is one of the deadliest crimes in this Convention. We all know that tackling organised crime requires a comprehensive approach, and the Firearms Protocol is an essential part of that approach.

Thank you