



For immediate release July 8, 2006

Contact Rachel Stohl, Senior Analyst, Center for Defense Information 202-797-5283

UN Small Arms Conference Collapses – U.S. Key Resister to Compromise

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The two-week UN Review Conference on Small Arms concluded Friday with no agreement. Participants in the Small Arms Working Group (SAWG) expressed disappointment at the Conference's failure to reach a conclusion. SAWG was dismayed by the actions and attitude of the United States. "The failure of the conference to agree on any document squandered an opportunity to establish critical agreements to combat small arms trafficking," said Rachel Stohl, a senior analyst with the Center for Defense Information who chairs the Small Arms Working Group. "U.S. intransigence significantly contributed to the collapse of this conference," she added.

The meeting was intended to review progress on the agreed 2001 Programme of Action and strengthen efforts for continued UN work on small arms. From the outset, the United States made clear its redlines - those issues on which they would not compromise in a final document - including references to development, inclusion of ammunition, a ban on sales of weapons to non-state actors, references to civilian possession, and mandatory follow-up. These U.S. positions were in stark contrast with the views of the majority of states. The U.S. refused to negotiate, and throughout the two weeks the United States thwarted efforts to strengthen national regulations to control small arms, to allow references on the impact of small arms on development, and refused to agree to convene future UN meetings on small arms. U.S. obstinacy during the two weeks also harmed U.S. efforts to gain its own conference priorities, as other countries were unwilling in many cases to support U.S. concerns.

"It is deeply disconcerting that the United States would not work with the international community and compromise," said Sarah Margon, a policy advisor at Oxfam America. "The unequivocal opposition of the United States to so many issues that had near universal agreement had serious implications for U.S. credibility," Margon added. Adding insult to injury, the United States held up its own practices as a model for other countries to follow at the end of the conference, after resisting all attempts for compromise and ways forward.

Although the conference failed, efforts to control the proliferation and misuse will continue. "One thousand people die every day from small arms and the international community faces an urgent need to develop a global strategy. Unfortunately, political posturing trumped concrete measures," said Scott Stedjan, the legislative representative for the Friends Committee on National Legislation. The next opportunity for the international community to act on small arms will take place at the General Assembly in October.

Editor's Note: SAWG is an alliance of U.S.-based non-governmental organizations and individuals that are working together to promote awareness of the small arms issue and changes in U.S. policies.

###