



**United Nations Conference to
Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to
Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light
Weapons in All Its Aspects**

Statement by

**Counselor Wael Al-Assad
Director
Multilateral Relations Department
League of Arab States**

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Statement of the League of Arab States by Mr. Wael Al-Assad, Director of Multilateral Relations, before the UN Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the PoA to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in SALW in All Its Aspects

Mr. Chairman,

It gives me great pleasure on behalf of the League of Arab States to join previous speakers in congratulating you on your election to chair this important conference. I would also like to express our appreciation for the efforts you exerted during the previous period in preparation for the meeting. I am confident that you will lead us, with your vast experience and evident leadership, to reach unanimously accepted results.

Mr. Chairman,

This conference represents an important opportunity to review and assess what has been achieved over the last five years. This should assist us in identifying the obstacles and shortcomings, and the necessary means to overcome them at the national, regional and international levels. The previous five years had proven that there is a wide variation in the extent of implementation of the POA from one region to another at these levels, and that many developing countries and regions lack two important factors. The first is training and expertise, and the second is financial support. Therefore it is necessary to focus in the coming stage on expanding the scope and nature of technical assistance to needy states, and to provide international expertise and adequate financing to support national and regional efforts.

Mr. Chairman,

The Arab States have contributed in 2001 to the international understanding that lead to the adoption of the POA as a pragmatic framework that has been carefully drafted to be acceptable by all parties. Like any other multilateral agreement, it is built on compromises that do not satisfy the ambitions of many, but nevertheless provides a sensitive balance. Therefore we stress the important of focusing our efforts at reviewing the achievements, implementing what has not yet been implemented, and attempting to find solutions to obstacles facing states and regional groupings that require assistance.

The Arab States have reiterated in this conference that its progress in the implementation of the POA is governed by their common position taken in 2001, which

has been incorporated in paragraphs 8, 9, 10, 11, 13 and 17 of the PoA. That position takes into account other international priorities and commitments. Of particular importance to the Arab States, is the confirmation that this effort should not affect the international priorities in the field of disarmament adopted in 1978, namely Nuclear Disarmament and then other weapons of mass destruction. It is of equal importance to also reiterate that this effort does not in anyway affect the right of nations to self-determination and to self-defense, particularly nations that are still under foreign occupation.

It was imperative to reiterate these positions in order to prevent bypassing or marginalizing other important international and regional priorities and issues.

Mr. Chairman,

Over the previous five years, the Arab States have exerted efforts to establish legislative and organizational frameworks, and to develop its structures at the national level to combat the illicit trade in SALW. While at the regional level, the League of Arab States attempted to strengthen regional cooperation and elaborate collective approaches, in collaboration with numerous international partners.

The Cairo conference, held at the Arab League H.Q. in 2003, in collaboration with the UN, was a major breakthrough in shedding light over the regional dimension of the illicit SALW. This event was followed by a number of meetings and workshops held in a number of Arab capitols. As a result of increasing regional awareness, the Arab League Council at the level of Foreign Ministers adopted two important resolutions in September 2004 and March 2006, in which they approved new frameworks and mechanisms for regional cooperation in this field. In addition, the Ministers requested the Arab League to:

- *Establish a Regional Focal Point within the Secretariat.*
- *Provide technical assistance and training to the Arab States according to their needs.*
- *Organize annual meetings for the National Focal Points to improve coordination, exchange of information, and provide capacity building programs.*
- *The Council also encouraged the Arab States to nominate National Focal Points.*

In addition, two additional ministerial councils within the Arab League also dealt with various aspects of the illicit SALW problem. These are the Council of Arab Interior

Ministers and the Council of Arab Justice Ministers. Both dealt with the illicit SALW problem and its implications on the Arab efforts to combat terrorism and organized crime. They adopted a number of regional mechanisms, laws and strategies to that effect.

There is no doubt that all these efforts represent a clear political will to combat the problem, and are an indication of a growing awareness with the importance of regional and international cooperation in this field.

Mr. Chairman,

In response to the directions given by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, the Arab League established a Regional Focal Point, with technical and financial support of the German and Swiss Governments. The RFP organized the first meeting of National focal Points in December 2005. As an indication of growing interest and awareness, the number of national Focal Points increased from (14) in December 2005 to (19) NFP in May 2006, out of 22 member states.

The RFP will proceed in the coming period on three avenues. The first is to establish a data bank and an information network for the Arab States. Secondly, the RFP will intensify efforts to raise public awareness with the various dimensions of the problem. Thirdly, it will organize regional training courses and workshops, in addition to its original mandate to organize meetings for the NFPs. These are all activities that require international assistance and support. Therefore, we believe that we need to investigate thoroughly means of intensifying international assistance to developing states, and not to burden them with new commitments that they will be unable to fulfill.

Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of the League of Arab States, allow me to wish you every success in your endeavors, hoping you will reach positive and practical conclusions.

Thank You Mr. Chairman