

Check Against Delivery

**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**

New York

29 June 2006

Rima Salah, Deputy Executive Director

Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to address you today on behalf of the United Nations Children's Fund. UNICEF sees this important Review Conference not as the end point of the process that was developed in 2001. Rather, it is the critical 'next-step' in building upon these accomplishments to focus our work in the coming few years.

As we see throughout the entire world, the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and their widespread accumulation and misuse have a wide range of negative humanitarian and socio-economic consequences. They pose serious threats to peace and reconciliation, global security, stability and sustainable development. For children, the uncontrolled proliferation and misuse of these weapons have a disastrous impact on their well being, rights, development and, ultimately, on their future role as parents and leaders. And, as evidence mounts,

we see that many countries at peace suffer considerable economic and social consequences as well.

UNICEF is a strong advocate and partner in the UN small arms process. At the heart of our mandate is the commitment to advocate for the protection of the rights of all children and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential. In this regard, UNICEF values the Programme of Action as a key instrument to create the conditions for a secure environment for children and families.

UNICEF is actively involved with governments, civil society, NGOs and other partners in implementing programmes related to the Programme of Action. Since 2001, UNICEF and partners have reached millions of children and their families through:

- Advocacy and/or DDR processes in 18 countries, which have assisted tens of thousands of children associated with armed forces and groups;
- Awareness raising campaigns on landmines and small arms in 40 countries and regions;
- Projects in support of children affected by armed conflict in more than 50 countries;
- Research on violence against children; and
- Education programmes promoting conflict resolution, non-violence and a culture of peace in schools and in informal education settings.

Mr Chairman,

Progress and achievement in these areas have come about with considerable dedication, commitment and resources. But implementation of the Programme of Action has not been consistent or even, at a time when the threats posed by instability and armed groups are rising in some regions. Some of the states participating in this Conference are also members of the UNICEF Executive Board and have noted in the annual session three weeks ago the serious risks to development caused by armed gangs and street violence. In this regard, renewed commitment and increased resources are needed to address the critical tasks that lie ahead of us. These efforts will directly contribute to children's rights and dignity being upheld.

Our children have already made their position clear on this issue. In 2002, for the first time ever, two child delegates addressed the UN General Assembly *Special Session on Children*. Gabriela Azurduy Arrieta, 13 years old, from Bolivia and Audrey Cheynut, 17 years old, from Monaco, said,

“We see an end to war; world leaders resolving conflict through peaceful dialogue instead of by using force; child refugees and child victims of war protected in every way and having the same opportunities as all other children; **disarmament**, elimination of the arms trade and an end to the use of child soldiers.”

(End quote.)

Mr. Chairman,

I will conclude by sharing several points that UNICEF feels are central to this Review Conference's outcome. The draft President's Non-Paper, which will be the Outcome Document for this Review Conference, includes only one specific reference to children and that in the context of armed conflict. We urge all delegations to incorporate wording that acknowledges that children in *peaceful countries* are also involved in and terribly affected by small arms and light weapons. We encourage delegations to bring these issues into prominence to promote an environment in which children can learn, grow, and be safe from the threat of small arms violence.

- Governments should implement laws in conformity with the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.
- Ensure that all Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration programmes pay attention to the specific needs of children. This includes girls who have been taken into armed groups to serve as sex slaves and girls and boys who may not be forced to use small arms but are obliged to serve as cooks and messengers. UNICEF supports reporting on the violations of children's rights in armed conflict through Security Council Resolution 1612.

- Further studies should be undertaken on the human cost of small arms, especially on children. To this end, UNICEF will support data gathering and will be pleased to speak with interested parties.
- Surveillance relating to child injuries and death due to small arms should be initiated to promote actions aimed at violence prevention and rehabilitation of child victims.
- Governments, civil society and other stakeholders should promote a culture of peace, including peace education and other approaches to conflict prevention and resolution.
- An integrated approach, recognising both the demand and supply sides of the equation, should be developed.
- Encourage respect for arms embargoes, including the criminalisation and punishment of violators.
- Establish Codes of Conduct to improve controls on the transfer of small arms and light weapons.
- Last but not least, implement the recommendations that will surely come from the Secretary General's Study On Violence Against Children, which will be launched this coming October.

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for this opportunity to share our views. They are shaped by our work on behalf of children in more than 157 countries over the last 60 years. Sixty years

is three generations. Are we going to let another generation pass before we take action on the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons?

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

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