

## **Human cost of unregulated arms trade and the urgency for an international Arms Trade Treaty**

Thank you Chair, fellow panellists, your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen.

A very good morning to everyone.

Allow me to dedicate this presentation to the tens of thousands of people who have lost their lives in my part of the world over the last decades.

This includes 160 people who died in Mumbai in November 2008 due to a terrorist attack fuelled by the unregulated arms trade.

The very fact that I am here at the sanctum of the United Nations is a testimony of how I and millions of others worldwide have survived violence caused by the unregulated arms trade and chosen a life dedicated to the cause of peace.

In my home region alone, I find weapons from 13 countries fuelling a bloody conflict.

Several countries present in this room will have never heard of my state, Manipur in India.

But the very fact that weapons produced in your countries have found their way to our towns and villages is a valid reason to find out how they came and what can be done to prevent the flow of arms.

We have a responsibility and an urgency to end this mayhem.

Throughout my childhood I saw weapons both of state and non-state actors taking control of our lives, our futures; and I thought all this was a normal part of growing up.

I lost my 12 year old niece in the violence. And later my family was subjected to a death warrant and displaced for almost a year. The reason: We refused to pay protection money to a non-state armed group.

Every day in our work we come across men, women and children who have endured a deep psychological crisis to overcome the impact of unregulated arms trade on their lives.

They are not able to be here at the United Nations to speak to you.

Therefore we all present have a responsibility.

We have to think that we sitting and debating in this room take decisions on ways forward for an Arms Trade Treaty that will transform the lives of millions worldwide.

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, we have a responsibility to make the ATT happen so that no further human lives are lost.

The monetary value of international authorised deliveries of arms is relatively small in global terms, amounting to around US\$ 31 billion per year – representing less than half of the value of the global coffee market.

But this completely belies the international significance of the arms trade.

The arms industry manufactures products and provides services that maim and kill.

One would expect, therefore, a strong degree of control commensurate with this responsibility – governments and industry working together to ensure that these weapons are used and sold responsibly.

Yet the conventional arms trade is like no other, operating outside the jurisdiction of the World Trade Organization, the parameters of the UN Conference on Trade and Development, and the bounds of the non-

proliferation regime. The control is left to individual governments, which may be unwilling or unable to ensure responsible practices.

Recent research has identified 1,135 companies manufacturing small arms and ammunition in at least 98 countries; and these numbers are increasing.

The profusion of arms-producing companies and nations presents a clear challenge to those who advocate strong controls.

Yesterday, several governments stated that if national controls are strong enough, we do not need an international treaty.

But most national controls are woefully weak, riddled with loopholes, characterised by wide gaps between policy and practice – and as a result they allow easy access to lethal weaponry.

Besides, national and domestic legislation in countries like my own cannot tackle the problem alone. In many national legislations, sophisticated arms used in terrorist acts and rights violations are not included and hence not subjected to controls.

One country alone cannot tackle the problem and it is time that we recognise this.

An international Arms Trade Treaty is desperately needed, in order to ban an international arms transfer if there is a substantial risk that the arms will be used in violations of international human rights or humanitarian law, if they will be used to undermine poverty reduction or to facilitate crime.

We do not want Mumbai to happen again – in any part of this world.

Governments thus need to work together to be more accountable to their citizens in providing protection from armed violence.

Governments and civil society need to work together to improve safety at the community level and to help men, women and children who have survived the violence.

The call for an ATT has been supported by millions of citizens around the world. We have an active NGO community in India working on these issues. Several eminent Indians like Nobel Laureate, Professor Amartya Sen, Former Scientific Advisor to PM, Prof MGK Menon and over 50,000 Indians have called for an ATT. We are working around the clock with Indian parliamentarians and more than 40 of them are already supporting us in the endeavour.

We must turn off the irresponsible supply of arms and drain the pool of existing uncontrolled weapons.

All governments must take responsible and concerted action to control the proliferation, possession and misuse of arms, in line with international law.

The irresponsible use and transfer of arms is neither inevitable nor in the interests of states.

An Arms Trade Treaty would make citizens around the world safer.

The time for action is now.

I call upon countries such as my own and others to take leadership in the important process.

To end with words of Mahatma Gandhi: Peace will not come out of a clash of arms but out of justice lived and done by unarmed nations in the face of odds.

I thank you all for your attention.