

Statement
by
H.E. Ambassador Peter Woolcott, President-designate of the
Final United Nations Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty,
To
The meeting of African Members of Parliaments on
“Addressing the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons:
Supporting an Arms Trade Treaty”
Windhoek, Namibia
7-8 March 2013

Excellencies
Distinguished members of Parliaments
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a pleasure and an honour for me to address you on the occasion of this meeting organized by the Parliamentarians for Global Action for the purpose of addressing the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, raising awareness, and mobilizing support for the Arms Trade Treaty.

I commend the Parliamentarians for Global Action and the Government of Namibia for organizing this meeting, which is yet another strong show of support for the forthcoming Final United Nations Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty that will be held in New York from 18 to 28 March.

Support for the Arms Trade Treaty has been wide and solid among governments and civil society, but I think it is particularly encouraging to see that African Parliamentarians are fully engaged in the Arms Trade Treaty process.

As legislators, you can play a crucial role in the coming days by advocating the adoption of a meaningful ATT. You will also be called to play a major role after the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty. For you will be entrusted, in your respective countries, with the ratification of this important treaty and for putting in place the legislative measures that will be required for its implementation.

The Arms Trade Treaty is necessary and long overdue. Presently, there is no agreed conduct governing the international trade in conventional arms. The absence of an international framework regulating the global trade in conventional arms makes it easier for arms to be diverted for use in illicit activities and armed conflict.

In all parts of the world, including Africa, the unregulated transfer of conventional weapons has fuelled conflict, human rights abuses, and crime and terror among civilian populations, leading to human suffering on a massive scale.

An agreement on internationally accepted criteria for assessing arms transfers can go a long way towards the efforts to forestall or deescalate conflicts and to combat armed criminal activities.

Any initiative which aims at profoundly changing international practice, needs to pass through difficult stages and overcome obstacles before it evolves into a mature product. This is no less true of the Arms Trade Treaty process. But after six years of study, debate and preparations, the world is ready for the ATT.

I am honoured that I have been given the trust of the Member States of the United Nations with the leadership of this final phase of the Arms Trade Treaty process. In preparation for this Conference, I have spent the past months consulting extensively multilaterally in New York and Geneva, regionally (including currently with the African Union in Addis Ababa) and bilaterally in a number of capitals. I am aware of the magnitude of the task at hand. And I am also aware that the expectations and stakes are high. Africa needs this Treaty, and the world needs this Treaty, and working together we can make the ATT a reality. I will count on your support.

I wish you success in your work over the next two days.