



**PARLIAMENTARIANS FOR GLOBAL ACTION
ACCION MUNDIAL DE PARLAMENTARIOS
ACTION MONDIALE DES PARLEMENTAIRES**

**STATEMENT BY DR. BERNADETTE LAHAI, MP (SIERRA LEONE) AT SIDE EVENT
TO FIRST UN PREPARATORY COMMITTEE ON AN ARMS TRADE TREATY**

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Introduction

I would like to start by thanking Oxfam for inviting me to speak at this important event today as well as PGA International for the sponsorship.

Parliamentarians for Global Action (or PGA as we call it) are actively involved in advocating for a global Arms Trade Treaty.

Currently, it is mobilizing its more than 1,300 members in more than 125 countries worldwide to advocate effectively their colleagues in parliament and their respective executive branches of government to ratify and domesticate regional, sub-regional, Continental and global instruments on arms trade and transfer as well as set up parliamentary and non-parliamentary networks to fight against the proliferation of arms and ammunitions.

I am pleased and privileged, as Chair of the PGA-Sierra Leone Chapter and an International Council Member, to be able to attend and observe the first ATT PrepCom here in New York.

I am even more please because coming from a post-conflict country, I have personal experiences of how, for eleven painful years, as a result of uncontrolled arms trade and transfer, rebels and militias embarked on one of the most savage atrocities against civilians ever known and experienced on the continent.

It is my fervent hope that by sharing these personal experiences, I shall be adding some value, modest though, to this ATT PrepCom, especially with regards to the effects of uncontrolled arms trade and transfer on poverty reduction and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of a post-conflict country like Sierra Leone.

Rebel War in Sierra Leone-1991-2002

Sierra Leone experienced an eleven-year rebel conflict between 1991 and 2002.

Our women and girls were abducted, raped, sexually molested, held as sex slaves, forced into marriages with men not their choice and had unwanted pregnancies and children.

Our men and boys were abducted, drugged, given arms to maim and killed and destroy people and properties, respectively.

Our rich mineral, agricultural and marine resources, that should have benefitted us, were squandered and proceeds used to purchase arms and ammunitions so as to prolong the war and suffering of innocent civilians.

The eleven-year war cost us dearly in terms of human lives and property and thus development. We cannot estimate the cost of this senseless war and despite eight years of post conflict recovery and reconstruction, we still are feeling its effect daily.

For instance, according to the Sierra Leone National Recovery Strategy 2002-2003, over half a million Sierra Leoneans were displaced.

99 of 730 Peripheral Health Units were completely destroyed, while 481 of the 631 remaining needed rehabilitation.

Of the 3,152 schools, 1,684 were completely destroyed and needed reconstruction, 1491 needed major rehabilitation, while 1,054 needed only minor repairs.

In the housing sector, of a total of 807,731, 311,318 were completely destroyed.

In the agriculture sector, the staple crop, rice, production declined by 65%, export crops by 70%, and livestock and fish production to 50% of the pre-war years.

The mining sector, which generated about 20% of the GDP, 20% fiscal revenue and provided income for over 270,000 workers dropped to only 0.1% of GDP.

All of the 287 court barriers were destroyed.

There was massive and unprecedented brain drain of Sierra Leone's trained and professional manpower.

Thus, if in 1960s, 1970s and 1980s annual economic growth averaged 4 percent, 3.5 percent and 1.5 percent, respectively, the armed conflict, in 1991 plunged the economy into further decline with an average fall in output of 4.5 percent between 1990-2000. Thus between 1990 and 2000, growth declined by 36 percent. At the same time savings and investment rates fell while income distribution became highly skewed to the rich, with over 70% of the population living in ...

extreme poverty, with a poverty gap index of 29%. No wonder Sierra Leone has been consistently at the bottom of the UN Human Development Index.

Post Conflict Recovery and Reconstruction-2002 to date
The war officially ended in January 2002. The National Recovery Strategy 2002-2003 estimated \$212, 504, 855 million for recovery requirements of accessible areas then.

70,000 Ex-combatants were disarmed, demolished and reintegrated. 25, 000 weapons, including millions of rounds of ammunitions, unexploded cluster bomblets, British anti-aircraft missiles, Soviet Spigot anti-tank guided weapon, two soviet SA-7 surface-to-air missiles and 23 anti-aircraft guns from Eastern Europe were turned in during the disarmament.

In addition UNDP provided \$16,600 cash incentives each to the 149 Chiefdoms and Western Area for being arms free and the Sierra Leone Police cordon and search operations to certify arms-free country.

Despite the above, Sierra Leone is still not arms free. Although declared as one of the safest post conflict countries on the continent, armed robbers still cart away every night properties worth millions of dollars, in addition to the terror (fear for their lives) civilians live in perpetually. Legitimate and defense arms and ammunitions for national protection continue to fall in illegitimate hands and claim hundreds of lives and millions worth of property annually.

To successfully pursue the war, the country's security sector's annual budgetary allocation increased dramatically to between 20-30% at the detriment of other very important sectors such as health, education, agriculture, gender and infrastructure (road, energy and housing), thus national development and the achievement of the MDGs. Even though Sierra Leone is no longer fighting a "rebel war" the security sectors still continue to be given the highest priority in budgetary allocation (between 17%-20%) compared to other sectors, to address post conflict residual security problems and concerns.

It is therefore no surprise that according to the recently concluded 2009 assessment report on Sierra Leone's status with regards the MDGs, the picture is very gloomy. According to the report, Sierra Leone is not likely to achieve any of the MDGs targets by 2015, despite the several National Development Strategies and Plans that have been designed and implemented since 2002. Progress made has been dwarfed by the share size of the task at hand. From the baseline year of 1990, and looking at developments in perspective, Sierra Leone's progress towards the MDGs has been described as lackluster.

For example, underweight and stunting prevalence are at 31% and 40%, respectively, Net Enrolment Rate, though improved from 42% in 1990 to 63% in 2004, educational attainment targets is still a major problem that is linked to poverty and gender.

Sierra Leone is characterized by high incidence of communicable diseases such as malaria, respiratory diseases and water borne diseases such as cholera. Life expectancy at birth fell to 34.5 years in 2005 down from 42 years in 1990 while under-five mortality and maternal mortality are 286 and 160 per 1,000 live births and the highest in the sub-region. 100, 000-200,000 sierra Leoneans are living with HIV/AIDS. 46% and 30% of the population in 2005 had access to improved sources of drinking water and sanitation facilities, respectively.

Despite the fact that female literacy rate is reported to have increased from 16% in 1996 to 23% in 2004 and female gross enrolment at primary level rose from 68% in 1990 to 107% in 2004, gender inequalities are still strong in Sierra Leone as indicated by women's low access to health and educational services and high prevalence of gender based violence.

Environmental degradation due to human activities is high.

The report acknowledges the current capacity constraints and urges attention to improving service delivery in order to improve the country's security, human and governance situation, failing that, the country risk degenerating back into worsening human poverty, further insecurity and ungovernable situation. \$18.9 billion is needed from 2007-2015 on infrastructures, human resources and financial resources for the country to achieve the MDGs, with a funding gap of \$17.6 billion (excluding government commitments for these sectors and private sectors and household contributions).

The above clearly illustrates how armed conflict can affect development and sustained growth.

Benefits of Arms Trade Treaty

Having given the above contextual background let me reflect a bit upon the importance of an ATT to Sierra Leone and West Africa. An ATT will strongly reinforce the actually quite impressive regional and national legislative framework already in place - the ECOWAS convention on SALW and our own national legislation, just further improved only a few weeks ago.

The benefit of the ATT will also extend beyond Sierra Leone and indeed West Africa.

For there are other regions of the world, in particular in Asia, where efforts at the regional level to agree upon a convention or protocol to regulate the trade in SALW have, to date, been unsuccessful.

With an ATT, countries in that region will now have the option of becoming a party to a convention regulating and control arms exports, even if regional efforts have failed to bear fruit. It will be an independent sovereign decision. They will not have to wait for other countries in their region to sign off.

In Sierra Leone we have ratified the ECOWAS Convention, in force since last year, and as recent as this past June, have introduced our own strong domestic SALW legislation by setting up a National Commission on Small Arms and Light Weapons. As early as 2003, we also established the Sierra Leone Chapter of the Parliamentary Network on Small Arms and Light Weapons (PNSALW) and have worked very closely with the respected-non-governmental organisation, the Sierra Leone Action Network on Small Arms (SLANSA) and also participated in many regional and sub-regional conferences on SALW.

Our tragic recent history demands nothing less.

But that is not, and cannot be, the end of the story,

Once adopted, the ATT will spur the process of implementation of obligations we have under ECOWAS Convention that may not yet have been fully domesticated into national law.

At such time that the ATT is negotiated, agreed upon and enters into force, and in ratifying and implementing its provisions into domestic law, Sierra Leone will complement the extensive work it has already done in the SALW area.

The tapestry of national, regional and international conventions seeking to effectively address the inadequate controls in the international trade in arms will become more densely woven.

The ATT is also not confined to SALW in its purported reach, so while SALW is an important part of ATT, its reach will extend to all conventional weapons, not just SALW - thus it will have added value as well, on top of the important regional and national initiatives that have already taken place

We are all aware of the impact that continued access to arms has on society - in terms of delaying development, the cost to healthcare systems of treating those injured/maimed, of resettling the

displaced,disarming, demobilizing and reintegrating of combatants, and recovery and reconstruction of damaged infrastructure a result of this status quo.

An ATT, in making it more difficult to access conventional arms for the wrong purposes, will, it is hoped, have only a positive effect in facilitating the development of those countries emerging from conflict like mine and controlling healthcare, educational and environmental costs associated with both conflict and post-conflict armed violence.

National legislation and regional conventions can only go so far, vital tools that they are.

The arms trade industry has long been global in its reach, operating in the shadows of lawlessness - arms cross porous borders, corrupt officials look the other way, governments of some of the most prominent countries in the international community feign concern, but pay lip-service only to attempts to reign in this frequently 'rogue' industry.

Economics and trade exports, to this day, still tragically trumps the rule of law and, if we are truthful, the protection of hundreds of thousands of human lives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the ATT, in a very real sense therefore, is not merely an idea whose time has come. In fact, it has been overdue for some time.

No, in a very real sense it is no less than an important evolutionary step for an international community still often far too indifferent or helpless (or both) in the face to the most serious challenges facing the most disadvantaged among us today.