



## **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**

### **Office of the Secretary General**

#### **Remarks by Paul Fritch Director of the Office of the Secretary General**

EAPC-OSCE Co-Sponsored 2008 Synergy Conference for  
Regional Organizations on the Implementation of the  
UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons

Brussels, 28 May 2008  
Opening Session

Mr Chairperson,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here and to address the opening session of this important conference. Many of you have travelled long distances, and I thank you all for taking the time and making the effort to participate in this joint EAPC-OSCE event. I wish to express our thanks also to Finland, Lithuania, Norway and the United Kingdom for their vital support in making this conference happen.

This meeting is important, because regional-level initiatives, we know, play a crucial role in small arms control.

Small arms trafficking cannot be fully controlled by individual countries on their own, because illicit trade is nourished by porous borders and insufficient national controls. Traffickers are quick to adopt trade routes where national controls are weak and take ample advantage of insufficient co-operation between border control authorities as well as differences in national regulations.

The work done by regional organizations is vital, first, because it complements and strengthens the implementation of the *UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light*

*Weapons* (PoA) – in particular, by allowing regions to address small arms problems from their own perspective and according to their particular needs.

Since the adoption of the UN Programme of Action (2001), there has been an encouraging increase in regional small arms control initiatives. Regional organizations have been very influential in helping countries improve their SALW laws, regulations and export controls, and also assisted in the destruction of large numbers of surplus SALW. These efforts have saved large numbers of lives and will continue to do so, thereby making them an indispensable part of the fight against illicit SALW trafficking.

Regional activities also act as a catalyst for global action against illicit small arms trafficking.

Regional actions, indeed, preceded and helped shape the Programme of Action (PoA). Since 2001, such efforts have created reciprocal effects between regional and global actions: regional and sub-regional efforts to curb illicit trade and proliferation of small arms can pave the way for further action at the global level, thereby having an important role in building consensus and momentum, and in advancing global norms.

The relationship also works the other way, with an international agreement on the illicit small arms trade opening the door to further regional and sub-regional action.

This inter-dependent connection is also true with regard to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Security risks posed by the destabilizing spread and proliferation of small arms and light weapons are of continuing concern to the OSCE participating States. Weapons transferred during times of conflict, diverted from legal trade, or stolen from poorly guarded storage sites can cause instability and hamper post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction in many parts of the OSCE region. The OSCE participating States have also recognized the pernicious effects that small arms trafficking has on crime, drug smuggling and trafficking in human beings.

The illicit trade in small arms is an issue of important concern for the OSCE. Many OSCE participating States are major producers and exporters of SALW. Many of our States also face problems with surplus weapons and ammunition as well as with controlling illicit trade in small arms. While some OSCE States have extra resources to

address these issues, others need assistance to deal with their different aspects -- for example in eliminating SALW surpluses or ensuring safe and secure stockpile management procedures.

Perhaps most importantly, there is a willingness of countries in the region to develop and commit themselves to an advanced regulatory framework in this field. Since the 1990s, the OSCE has worked at the forefront of international efforts to curb illicit SALW trade and develop effective national and regional practices on SALW control. As part of our efforts, we have also developed an assistance mechanism to help States destroy excess small arms, light weapons, and conventional ammunition, as well as to ensure adequate storage conditions of their remaining holdings.

In addition, the OSCE organizes regular trainings, seminars and conferences for national authorities dealing with small arms related issues as well as for international audiences. This joint EAPC-OSCE Conference is an excellent example of this type of activity. It is the first of its kind, and it has been rightly recognized at the UN level as an important contribution to the work done at the level of regional organizations in support of the Programme of Action. For its part, I believe this is a step forward in giving regional organizations the acknowledgement they deserve for valuable work done in various regions to combat the problem of illicit trade and proliferation of small arms.

As my colleague from NATO, the Deputy Secretary General Ambassador Claudio Bisogniero noted in his opening remarks, this conference seeks to facilitate further co-operation and to promote best practices between regional organizations in implementing the Programme of Action as well as to endorse the experience gained and best practices developed in different regions. Over the next three days, we will have the chance to present achievements and expertise and to share problems and challenges that remain.

I hope that this meeting will contribute to increasing our collective knowledge about the problem of illicit SALW trafficking in different regions and existing regional and national regulations. Certainly, it will be thought-provoking to hear the experiences of organizations in dealing with these issues and to exchange views about practical ways forward in better learning from and working with each other.

I look forward to interesting discussion today and wish you every success in your work.

Thank you for your attention.