

## PREFACE

Speaking at a seminar on small arms and light weapons on 25 September 1998<sup>1</sup>, the Honourable Lloyd Axworthy, Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs, outlined Canada's approach to dealing with the subject:

"First, the threat posed by small arms and light weapons affects all of us and demands international solutions. The small arms and light weapons market is transnational, going beyond the reach of individual countries. Patchwork solutions are doomed to fail unless we also take concerted global action.

"Second, illicit diversion from the legal trade in small arms and light weapons contributes to the problem and needs to be addressed. New military weapons are manufactured every day. Virtually all of them originate as legal and legitimate tools for defence and security. However, too many fall into the hands of criminals, terrorists and drug smugglers — resulting in unnecessary and unacceptable human suffering. Steps are being taken to address this illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons. For example, the Organization of American States has concluded a Convention encouraging co-operation among its member countries in this area. More can be done, especially in the UN context.

"Finally, solutions must be practical. They must make a real difference not only in reducing the flow of weapons but also in changing attitudes. Transfers of many kinds of heavy conventional weapons are instantly seen as being destabilizing and potentially harmful. As a result, they are made subject to arms control export guidelines and transparency regimes. Small arms and light weapons, when transferred in large numbers and into the wrong hands, can have precisely the same deleterious effect. Yet because they are not considered along with other weapons systems, there is no regime to address the negative consequences of legal transfers."

One of the suggested means for increasing transparency with respect to the licit trade of small arms and light weapons is the adaptation of existing international data reporting registers on arms transfers, such as the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, or the construction of specialized regional registers. It has been suggested that such a small arms and light weapons register would provide a confidence building tool as well as a basis for a better understanding of the scope, magnitude and patterns of international trade respecting these weapons.

Little detailed analysis of the requirements for such a small arms and light weapons register exists. To help fill this gap in background research, Canada's Verification Research Program undertook a project to explore the issues relating to a small arms and light weapons

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<sup>1</sup> The seminar was sponsored by the British American Security Information Council and took place in New York on the margins of the Fifty-Third Session of the United Nations General Assembly.