

The conference was jointly organised by Saferworld (UK) and the ISS (South Africa) which are grateful for the support of the UK Department for International Development, and for the contributions and commitment of all conference participants.

There is an urgent need for a SADC action programme to tackle light arms proliferation and illicit arms trafficking, and the EU and other donors have an important role to play in co-operating with and supporting SADC countries in their efforts to develop and implement such a programme. We also hope that this plan, and the process which gave rise to it, may provide a useful model for similar initiatives in other sub-regions.

PREAMBLE

The proliferation of light weapons and illicit arms trafficking in Southern Africa pose a major threat to peace, security and development in the region. Although they do not in themselves cause the conflicts and criminal activities in which they are used, the wide availability, accumulation and illicit flows of such weapons tends to escalate conflicts; undermine peace agreements; intensify violence and the impacts of crime in society; impede economic and social development; and impede the development of social stability, democracy and good governance.

There is a close relationship between peace and security in Southern Africa, both internally and internationally, and the economic, social and political development of countries in the region.

In the existing conditions in Southern Africa, effective action to control arms flows and availability requires determined, comprehensive and co-ordinated action not only at the local and national levels but also at the level of the region of Southern Africa. Moreover, the effectiveness of regional action on light arms proliferation and illicit arms trafficking in Southern Africa would be reinforced through co-operation with the OAU, the EU and its member states, SADC and/or its members, and also with the wider international community.

The recent increased awareness of the problems of light arms proliferation and illicit arms trafficking, in Southern Africa and also internationally, is to be welcomed. It is also important to recognise the numerous initiatives, resolutions and agreements to address the problem that have recently been taken in Southern Africa, the Sahara-Sahel, the OAU, the OAS, the UN and its agencies, and other members of the international community.

Recent initiatives by the EU, particularly the establishment in 1997 of its Programme for preventing and combating illicit trafficking in conventional arms, and progress towards an EU Code of Conduct, are noteworthy and welcome. They provide an important opportunity to develop co-operation between the EU and Southern Africa to tackle light arms proliferation and illicit arms trafficking.

However, it is important to recognise that present actions to tackle these problems in Southern Africa remain inadequately developed and often ineffective. Awareness of the severity of the problem still needs to be increased in some quarters. The problem requires a co-ordinated regional approach, but a Southern African action programme has yet to be developed. An integrated and comprehensive response is needed to meet the complex challenges of light arms proliferation and illicit trafficking, yet most of the responses remain fragmented and inadequately resourced.