

ARF Seminar on Conventional Weapons Transfers
Phnom Penh, Kingdom of Cambodia
February 21-22, 2001

Annex E

Opening Remarks

By H.E Mr. Rey Pagtakhan
Secretary of State for Asia Pacific of Canada

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**By the Hon. Dr. Rey D. Pagtakhan, P.C., M.P.
Secretary of State (Asia-Pacific)**

**At the ARF/CBMs Seminar on Conventional Weapons Transfers
21 February 19, 2001, Phnom Penh, Cambodia**

Excellency,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The issue of small arms and light weapons is complex and the challenges it poses vary from region to region and country to country. Thus, there is a need for an integrated approach from you through this seminar.

From you through this seminar to distill wisdom

Hence, we are pleased to be co-hosting this seminar on Conventional Arms Transfers with our friends from Japan and Cambodia. In particular, we would like to thank our host, the Government of Cambodia, for their gracious efforts in organizing this event.

As a committed member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and as an Asia-Pacific country, Canada has a keen interest in promoting and contributing to substantive consideration of regional security issues.

As the only regional security organization in the Asia-Pacific region, the ARF is not only a central forum for our discussion of these important issues but it provides the region with the means to convey its unique perspective to the international community. Canada's sense is that the work is looking increasingly to the ARF for that valuable contribution and leadership.

Spanning a vast region, the ARF is characterized by enormous diversity. The ARF has been effective in promoting not only understanding but a shared sense of purpose that has gone to great lengths in bringing us together and building confidence and security in the region.

The unrestrained proliferation of conventional weapons, including small arms and light weapons, poses a threat to both "traditional" security, (the security of nation-states) and "human" security, (the security of citizens).

It is generally accepted that the excessive accumulation of conventional arms can threaten regional security, diverts resources needed for basic social and economic development, and increases the likelihood of destruction and human suffering in the event of war.

Transparency and responsibility in transfers of conventional weapons remain critical elements in our efforts to build confidence and enhance stability among ARF members.

Confidence building is at the heart of what the ARF does. Confidence building measures are valuable to us for information exchange, training, and networking with our ARF colleagues.

This Confidence Building Measure (CBM), on transparency and responsibility in the transfers of conventional weapons, is an issue of great importance to Canada. The ARF has also recognized its importance when, in 1988, it including the United Nations Conventional Arms Register (UNCAR) among those arms control and disarmament agreements that were established and recognized confidence building measures.

In 1992, the UN Conventional Arms Register was established and remains today the only global co-operative security instrument with a mandate to deal with the challenges related to the proliferation of conventional arms.

The primary function of the Register is to promote greater transparency in international arms transfers, both as a confidence-building measure and an early warning mechanism. The exchange of information on the nature and extent of the arms trade should also encourage greater restraint on the part of both supplier and recipient states.

Why do we say this?

The UN resolution establishing the Register calls upon all UN states to submit data voluntarily on their imports and exports of conventional weapons systems during the previous calendar year. It also invites states to submit data on their military procurement through national production and on their current military holdings.

Canada has strongly supported efforts to create and improve the UN Arms Register. To encourage the development of greater transparency, Canada routinely provides additional "background" information to the Register on its domestic holdings and national production of conventional weapons, and has argued in support of the addition of this information to the Register by all states. We believe that this register can be improved.

That is why Canada has also called for the measured and careful deepening of the Register to improve the qualitative nature of the data and has actively supported the provision of the UN Register data to regional organizations. The success of the register is dependent upon the support of all nations.

The first step has been taken by the ARF in support of transparency by circulating our UN Conventional Arms Register (UNCAR) submissions among ARF members.

Continued dialogue is also critical. Canada is supportive of expanding and enhancing regional participation in the UN Conventional Arms Register. We will examine, in the context of this seminar, whether the creation of a regional register or a regional

networking of information sharing would be supportive of ARF members' interests and concerns.

We, the members of the ARF, have recognized that the issue of small arms and light weapons is complex.

We must work together to prevent these weapons from ending up in the hands of traffickers, terrorists, and others who seek to harm our countries and our citizens. We must develop mechanisms to deal comprehensively with the excessive and destabilizing accumulation of these weapons, as well as their unrestrained, irresponsible or uncontrolled transfer, which are so closely related to increased occurrences of armed conflict, crime and violence.

We recognise that the illicit trafficking in weapons poses a dire threat to the security of both individuals and states but addressing illicit trafficking is not enough. Illicit trafficking is intrinsically linked to the legal production of small arms and light weapons. It is estimated that over 90% of illicitly trafficked arms originated in legal transfers.

It is, therefore, important to examine and adequately control legal activity because by controlling legal activity we are better able to identify and counter illegal activity!

Last May in Jakarta, ASEAN countries met to consider the role of illicit small arms trafficking in South East Asia.

Last October in Seoul, the Republic of Korea hosted the ARF Expert Group meeting on Transnational Crime where we discussed various aspects of the issue.

Although we did not come to a conclusion for specific ARF activities, we did agree to continue our discussions, in particular, an examination of a possible ARF Declaration on Small Arms and Light Weapons as proposed by Australia.

Last month, the member states of the United Nations met for the second session of the preparatory committee of the 2001 UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects.

There the international community was able to continue its work to develop a global action plan to deal with the excessive and destabilising accumulations and uncontrolled spread of small arms and light weapons.

I understand that this second session was successful in advancing our work.

Indeed, the challenges associated with small arms and light weapons vary from region-to-region and from country-to-country.

We all agree that an integrated approach is needed when facing a complex problem and that we will need to generate a holistic solution-there is no simply answer. The variety of

factors which have driven the proliferation of small arms in different regions and the variable impact upon societies has led to the development of a wide range of initiatives embodying different but mutually reinforcing objectives and methodologies.

That is why the 2001 Conference, to be held in New York this July, comes at an important time for providing the framework, via the action plan, to encourage these national and regional processes, through developing appropriate international norms, standards, programmes and mechanisms.

Let us continue the work that we have begun in Korea and look for solutions together.

Valuable progress has been made but we must continue to press forward on all aspects of these issues.

I wish you a very productive seminar and would like again to thank our host, the Government of Cambodia, for the organisation of this timely event.

Thank you for the opportunity that you have provided through this seminar. I hope to distill wisdom from your efforts to help solve this very pressing human issue.