

Opening Remarks

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United Nations Regional Seminar

Enhancing International and Regional Cooperation
to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate Illicit Brokering in Small Arms and
Light Weapons in East and Southeast Asia

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Mr. Tawin Pleansri, Secretary General of the National Security Council of the Thai Government,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to express the United Nations' profound gratitude to the Government of Thailand for generously hosting this conference. The Governments of Austria, Japan and of the Republic of Korea provided financial support, for which we are most grateful.

To all participants in this meeting, from governments, international and regional organisations and the civil society, I extend a warm welcome on behalf of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific.

The problems of illicit small arms are truly a global one, with different manifestations. They range from full-scale conflicts, civil strife, violations of UN arms embargoes, to terrorism, connections with drug trafficking and endemic crime. The region of East and Southeast Asia has not been immune to the problems caused by the uncontrolled flow of small arms, leading to conflict and civil unrest, falling levels of security, and missed social and economic opportunities.

Over the past few decades, the global patterns of trade in these weapons have profoundly changed due to the increased participation of private intermediaries, or "middlemen", in the trade which had traditionally been dominated by State authorities and Government agents. As the evidence suggests, now brokers operating in a globalized environment play a critical role in the illicit trade in small arms.

Against this background, Member States of the UN have recognized the pressing need to address the problem of illicit brokering in small arms and light weapons in the 2001 UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. In light of this, they also committed themselves to develop national regulations on the issue as an essential first step.

In its report to the UN General Assembly in 2007, the Group of Governmental Experts on the prevention of illicit brokering in Small Arms concluded that although arms brokering is not an illegal activity *per se*, unregulated and poorly regulated arms brokering activities may result in small arms and light weapons transactions that increase the risk of arms being diverted to conflict-prone areas and embargoed entities, as well as to organized criminal and terrorist groups.

The Third Biennial Meeting of States in July 2008 stressed the importance of the issues of illicit brokering in small arms and light weapons and called for further actions. Just over a month ago, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 64/50 and reiterated therein that illicit brokering in small

arms and light weapons is a serious problem that the international community should address urgently. The Assembly underlined the fact that the issue of illicit trade in SALW requires concerted efforts at the national, regional and international levels and that their uncontrolled spread in many regions of the world has a wide range of socio-economic consequences and poses a serious threat to peace, reconciliation, security and sustainable development.

Now, how to deal with those challenges posed by this problem? At the Third Biennial Meeting of States, Member States reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen and implement national legislation on brokering activities where appropriate. The measures suggested by Member States include,

- First, the reaffirmation of their commitment under the Programme of Action to develop adequate national legislation or administrative procedures regulating the activities of brokering including measures such as registration of brokers and licensing,
- Second, the acknowledgement of the importance of implementing the recommendations contained in the report of the Group of Governmental Experts on illicit brokering,
- Third, the importance of international and regional cooperation to tackle the problem of illicit brokering in small arms and light weapons, including cooperation between national law enforcement agencies and judicial systems and assistance for national capacity building.

It is because of this need for enhanced international and regional cooperation to prevent, combat and eradicate illicit brokering in small arms and light weapons that we gathered here today and tomorrow. Bringing the countries of East and Southeast Asia together in our efforts to combat illicit brokering in small arms and light weapons gives you the opportunity to build on the excellent work that has already been done in our region and to connect our national efforts with regional approaches. We also hope to have a useful feedback from actors of other regions and the civil society as the countries in this region can benefit from lessons learned from those partners. It is about strengthening national legislation and regulation, about capacity building and assistance; and it is about how your efforts can profit from each and every one engaged in this work.

Finally, let me stress that your active participation during the two days is crucial to the success of this meeting. In particular, I hope we can have a thorough debate which would lead to a concrete way forward and follow-ups for all of us to profit from, beyond these two days.

I wish you a very fruitful and results-oriented meeting.
Thank you for your attention.