

Remarks by Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs
Third Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty
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Mr. President, Ambassador Korhonen,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I have the honour to represent the Secretary-General of the United Nations at this important gathering, and thank you for the opportunity to say a few words today in my capacity as the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs.

At the outset, I wish to commend the tremendous commitment by all those in attendance. In less than three years since the Arms Trade Treaty entered into force, nearly half of the membership of the United Nations has become a party. This is a remarkable achievement, which speaks to the extraordinary efforts you have made in the interest of ensuring the proper regulation of the global arms trade.

I am pleased to note that a total of 92 States have joined the ATT. But the regional breakdown of the parties paints a telling picture about the challenges we still need to overcome in order to effectively implement the Treaty. In three regions, the membership rate is at 70 per cent or higher.

This includes the Group of Western European and Other States where 21 States have joined, the Eastern European Group where 18 States have joined, and the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, where 24 States have joined.

Progress toward universality is lagging in the two other regions. In Africa, 22 States have joined, representing 41 per cent of the region. In Asia and the Pacific, only four States joined, or a mere seven per cent of the region.

This trend is unfortunately correlated with the fact that countries in the Asia-Pacific region, and particularly within the Middle East, account for the highest annual growth in arms imports.

But these numbers alone do not represent the whole story. According to data from SIPRI, only half of the top 10 arms exporters and two out of the top 10 importers have joined.

We clearly have a long way to go until the Treaty reaches the level of adherence necessary for it to function as an effective regime. In this connection, I am encouraged that universalization remains a high priority for the States Parties.

With respect to the pursuit of universalization, I wish to offer some general suggestions.

First, the Parties themselves bear a particular responsibility to promote the Treaty and its norms. To be most effective, Parties should commit at the highest level to the promotion of the Treaty, especially in those States with which they have active military relationships and trade agreements. Parties should also seek to reflect positive references to the Treaty in the outcomes of the regional bodies in which they participate.

Second, outreach on universalization should be targeted and prioritized on the basis of metrics and quantified goals. In this connection, partnerships between States and civil society can be especially beneficial.

Third, let's find new ways to effectively engage the United Nations. The UN Office for Disarmament Affairs already offers guidelines for accession and a toolkit for implementation. Our three regional centres stand ready, upon request, to facilitate tailored assistance and outreach in support of the goals of the ATT and its universality.

As I hope that our efforts progressively shift from universality to implementation, we will need to consider the role of the ATT within the context of the broader disarmament and arms control architecture.

Of course, the ATT was not necessarily conceived as a disarmament instrument alone, or as a means for achieving reductions in military budgets or in the over-accumulation of arms. But this higher objective is clearly alluded to in the text of the Treaty itself, which cites the commitment expressed in the UN Charter to “seek to promote the establishment and maintenance of international peace and security with the least diversion for armaments of the world’s human and economic resources.”

We should have every expectation that the Treaty, when fully implemented, will measurably reduce harm to civilians in armed conflict, dampen the supply of weapons to countries engaged in active hostilities, enhance stability and ultimately lower the demand for the acquisition and stockpiling of arms. This Treaty therefore is an important part of the overall disarmament architecture, and will contribute to Secretary-General Guterres’s vision of “disarmament that actually saves lives”. This should also eventually result in the effective reduction of military spending and stockpiles worldwide, in contribution to the purposes and objectives of the United Nations.

The role of the Treaty in facilitating other UN objectives is also clear, especially with respect to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The ATT is one of the most important legally binding tools we have to help reduce and eradicate the illicit trade in arms. I therefore welcome your focus on the SDGs and look forward to the outcome of your deliberations.

Before I close, I would like to say a few words about the support by the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs for the implementation of the Treaty. As you are aware, my Office administers the Trust Facility Supporting Cooperation in Arms Regulation, otherwise known as UNSCAR, which complements the ATT trust fund. Since its inception in 2013, it has funded dozens of projects on arms regulation immediately relevant for the ATT, on all the major populated continents. I will not describe the full list of projects we have supported, but I wish to emphasize that we continue to welcome additional donors.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

You can count on my full support in your work to promote, universalize and implement the ATT. The fulfillment of the aspirations of the Treaty will bring benefits to so many other areas of the UN's work in the area of conflict prevention, sustaining peace, and development. I wish you all the best in your deliberations.

Thank you very much.