

United Nations Workshop on Small Arms and Light Weapons in Beijing

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OPENING SESSION

Welcome remarks by Mitsuro DONOWAKI
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Ladies and gentlemen, Distinguished Participants, Excellencies,

On behalf of the Government of Japan, one of the three co-sponsoring governments of this workshop, I wish to join with my previous speaker in extending a hearty welcome to all participants of this workshop. Also, I would especially like to express my appreciation to the Government of China for its initiative to host this workshop. It was almost 30 years ago that I took part in the negotiation and successful conclusion of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between our two countries as head of the political section of the Embassy of Japan here in Beijing. Now, I am pleased to see with my own eyes today's modernized and developed city of Beijing.

Dear Colleagues,

Small Arms and Light Weapons, 630 million of which are estimated to be in circulation in the world, are sometimes called "de-facto weapons of mass destruction". Although Asia may not be the most SALW-affected region compared with Africa or Latin America, Asia is nevertheless greatly affected by the problems of small arms. SALW killed or wounded a huge number of people in the countries afflicted by recent internal

conflicts in Asia, such as Cambodia, Timor-Leste and Afghanistan, and even today innocent people, most of them women and children, fall victim to these weapons used in terrorist activities in our region. Tackling the problems of SALW, and also combating transnational organized crimes such as arms smuggling, are indeed crucial for Asian countries in order to achieve stability and development of society. Today we are here for this workshop with more than 70 overseas participants, mostly from South-East and Central Asia, which suggests the importance of this issue in this region.

Dear Colleagues,

As we know, the United Nations has played a leading role in tackling the problems of small arms and light weapons since 1995, when the issue was first taken up. Japan, together with other countries, has taken a number of initiatives, examples of which include sponsoring the General Assembly's annual resolutions on SALW and the original reports of the UN Panel and the Group of Governmental Experts on Small Arms, both chaired by myself, as well as the efforts made by Ambassador Kuniko Inoguchi as the Chair of the UN First Biennial Meeting of States on Small Arms.

The "Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects", adopted at the UN Conference in 2001, provides pragmatic prescriptions for the international community in addressing the issue of SALW. We are convinced that all countries, together with international organizations and civil society, should make every effort for the steady and vigorous implementation of the PoA. In order to promote the implementation of the PoA, Japan has been actively providing assistance to the countries affected by the scourge of SALW in Asia: --- SALW collection and destruction projects in Cambodia and DDR (disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants) projects in

Afghanistan are just two cases in point. Japan is willing to continue and expand such cooperation.

Dear Colleagues,

Now, I would like to make a few points that my Government considers to be important with respect to this workshop.

First of all, the most important purpose of this workshop is to deepen understanding of the Programme of Action on SALW and to promote its further implementation in the regions of South-East Asia and Central Asia. Naturally, various aspects related to its implementation will have to be discussed. Japan is very pleased on this occasion to co-sponsor this workshop together with China and Switzerland, after organizing such workshops in Tokyo in January 2002, in Indonesia in February 2003, in Kazakhstan in February 2004, and in Fiji in August 2004, in close cooperation with the United Nations. I hope that this workshop will serve not only as a follow-up to the latest workshops held in Indonesia and Kazakhstan, but also as a useful occasion to advance the achievements of earlier workshops.

Secondly, I hope that this workshop will offer a good occasion for all participants to exchange information and share experiences in tackling the problems of SALW, not only at the national level, but also at the regional level. Although there may exist differences between South-East Asia and Central Asia in their approaches to the problems of SALW, it is nevertheless helpful to share experiences and know-how in addressing SALW problems. Moreover, taking into consideration the importance of the small arms issue in our region in parallel with other crucial problems such as international organized crime or terrorism, we should make effective use of existing regional frameworks and mechanisms to take concrete action, including the

development of the network for information-sharing and cooperation among police, customs and border-control officials.

Dear Colleagues,

Today we gather here for a useful and action-oriented workshop, whose outcome will provide a good contribution to successive important SALW-related UN meetings, namely the Third Tracing OEWG in June, the Second Biennial Meeting in July and the Review Conference of the PoA next year. Of course, the problems of SALW cannot be solved overnight. It will take perhaps ten, twenty or more years' sustained and dedicated efforts by all members of the international community. In tackling the problems of small arms and light weapons in our region, what we need is continuous working level cooperation through initiatives such as this workshop, as well as a steady increase in the number of concrete projects and programmes in implementing the PoA in our region. I hope this workshop will serve as a good example of such cooperation.

Thank you very much.