

Side Event on Small Arms and Light Weapons

German House, 1 October 2015

Opening Statement by Federal Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier

Dr. Arias,
Minister,
Commissioner,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Former Secretary General Kofi Annan once rightly described small and light weapons as the real weapons of mass destruction. The misuse of small arms and light weapons is by no means only a regional challenge. It is a worldwide problem. However, illegal arms' trafficking has the most significant consequences in areas with armed conflict, violence and organized crime. I am very happy that the panelists, who I especially welcome, are not only experts on the subject but also reflect the different perspectives in which small arms control needs to be treated. I am glad that Minister Zahabi Ould Sidi Mohamed, Commissioner Smaïl Chergui, High Representative Kim Won-soo as well as Óscar Arias Sánchez as key-note speaker have accepted my invitation.

In the light of threats posed by terrorist groups like ISIS and Boko Haram, which are not limited by national borders, the international community needs to bundle its efforts to reduce illicit small arms trafficking. As United Nations Secretary-General Ban stated in his report on small arms and light weapons, “weapons enable their user to

dramatically enhance the ability to project power and to exercise coercive control within and across national borders.” Weapons, most of which are in the hands of non-state actors, cause tremendous human suffering and losses. Threats posed by small and light weapons are one of the root causes for displacement and migration.

Internationally binding regulations are key for the control of small and light weapons. The latest success of the International Community is the Arms Trade Treaty. Regulating the legal arms trade, it contributes to safeguard weapons, fight proliferation and thus prohibit conflicts from deteriorating. But we have to go beyond. To create a “Global Partnership against the illicit trafficking of Small and Light Weapons” could be our long-term goal. Germany stands ready to engage with its partners in this respect.

Germany will continue, together with partners like the United Nations, the African Union and non-governmental organizations, to support manifold initiatives and projects in control of small and light weapons, starting with capacity building in supporting National Commissions for Small Arms and Light Weapons like in Cote d’Ivoire up to building secure weapons and ammunitions storage sites like in the Democratic Republic of Congo to mention just two examples.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The topic of small arms and light weapons has been high on the agenda this year. The significant reduction of illicit small arms trafficking included into the Sustainable Development Goals being certainly one of the most important outcomes. Small arms control is not a topic aside but a basis for stability, security and social as well as economic development. The Sustainable Development Goal 16.4, which aims to significantly reduce the number of small arms available worldwide, is the new benchmark for

Small Arms Control. Germany is decided to work hard for reaching this goal. I am curious to hear which opportunities the panelists expect from this new benchmark and how we could make best use out of it.

I am now happy to give the floor to an outstanding figure in the area of peace and security, a strong promotor and supporter of the Arms Trade Treaty, Nobel Peace Prize winner, Mr Óscar Arias.