



Permanent Delegation of
Belgium to the OSCE

Combating Illicit Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons by Air

Special FSC Meeting, March 21, 2007

Opening Address by François-Xavier de Donnée

Minister of State

Member of Parliament

Excellencies, Mr. Secretary-General, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I'm very pleased to be able to address you today. The fact that this meeting takes place is already significant in itself. It was decided upon after a political process which covered most of 2006. This meeting is testimony to the joint political resolve to further explore ways to counter the illicit trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons.

As a politician and parliamentarian I closely follow the issue of small arms trafficking. I am, for example, rapporteur of the Inter-Parliamentarian Union on this subject. Governments have already drawn up an international framework for action. The OSCE Document on SALW and the UN Program of Action are two examples. The Strategy of the European Union is another one.

Yet I believe more can be done. Diplomats, experts and politicians should work hand in hand to address the problem of illicit trafficking by ensuring the existing commitments are implemented and by adding new measures where needed.

In the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly there is support for this work. I initiated two resolutions on the subject, which were adopted unanimously. The resolution in Washington in 2005 draws the attention to the destabilizing effects outside the OSCE region of certain arms exports originating from inside the OSCE region. The resolution in Brussels in 2006 refers specifically to air transportation, the subject of today's meeting.

It is now widely recognized that the spread of small arms to or near areas of conflict, has a devastating effect. The presence of arms can spark a conflict or deepen an existing one, making it even more violent. It can also feed criminality. The lingering presence of small arms is a major challenge to DDR efforts, Demobilization, Disarmament and Reconstruction. The story of the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which I know well, is a particularly sad one. In the DRC and in the Horn of Africa, SALW are real weapons of mass destruction.

Case studies have shown that small arms used in conflicts can be procured from a variety of sources. Buying on the illicit market and then transporting by air is one of the documented and most probably widely used methods. There was recent TV coverage of European cargo planes unloading weapons near Victoria lake and loading fish from the lake to take it back to Europe. This is clearly unacceptable.

We should also not forget that a weapon as such is harmless. It is the ammunition that makes it lethal. I advocate a comprehensive approach, one that deals with the weapons and the ammunition.

This air transportation can take many forms, ranging from small to large deliveries, from smuggling via commercial flights to unscheduled flights flying literally below any radar screen.

Today we shall learn more of the scale and scope of problem today and learn about the existing regulatory framework.

Finding concrete measures against trafficking by air should be our goal. Should we improve our export controls ? Do we need more cargo verification ? Can risk and threat assessment help to target intervention ? How can the public and the private sector join efforts ?

The political and humanitarian consequences of not dealing with the illicit arms trade are clear for all to see. I hope this meeting, the first of its kind in the international arena, will help us close loopholes and make life more difficult for those involved in the illicit arms trade.

Thank you.