



Parliamentarians for Global Action

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'LEGISLATORS AND THE ARMS TRADE TREATY - A VITAL ROLE'

PERMANENT MISSION OF FINLAND TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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Your Excellencies, Fellow Parliamentarians, Ladies & Gentlemen

It is my honour and pleasure to welcome you to our Workshop today on 'Legislators and the Arms Trade Treaty - A Vital Role'.

At the outset I wish also, on behalf of PGA, to express our warm appreciation to the Permanent Mission of Finland for so kindly agreeing to host this Workshop (TURNING TO FINNISH AMBASSADOR).

Your hospitality is very much appreciated.

I am also very grateful to all of the Members of Parliament with us here today.

That you have travelled so far and will spend an entire week away from your busy schedules back home is truly a testimony to your commitment to the negotiation of a robust ATT

I am looking forward to hearing your different views on how you believe we, as Legislators, can have most impact in promoting a robust ATT

PAUSE

PGA in many ways 'started life' over 30 years ago as a group of Parliamentarians from around the world advocating for Disarmament.

Our Members played an essential part in making the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty a reality as well as the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Our Peace & Democracy Programme has been actively advocating for a robust Arms Trade Treaty as far back as 2006 when we held a Workshop on Small Arms Light Weapons and a Proposed Arms Trade Treaty in the House of Representatives of the Philippines in Manila.

Since that time, and working with others including UNDP, the United Nations Office in West Africa, OSCE, UNICEF, foreign embassies, civil society partners and Members of Parliament in countries where the Peace Building Commission is actively involved, PGA has at all times vigorously sought to ensure that Legislators - as key stakeholders in this process - are kept front and center of the global debate.

Our Workshops in the Philippines, Senegal and Georgia....

The Participation of PGA Members as integral Members of national delegations in past UN Biennial Meetings on the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Law Weapons....

And the participation of some of our MPs, as integral members of national delegations, in all ATT PrepComs to date....

All these efforts have been undertaken with one overriding objective:

To make sure that, when the time comes, our Members of Parliament will be properly equipped to play the decisive role that they can and must play in this area.

PAUSE

With that brief background, I think we should be clear, right from the start, what is the main goal of our Workshop today.

Simply put, it is to identify what are the different ways in which we lawmakers can play a substantial role in making a robust ATT a meaningful reality.

For my part, I see it in a sequential manner - a series of events, each one of which in turn triggers a different key role for us lawmakers:

1. The first stage is the preliminary stage. This is where we are now.

The desired contents of the ATT are being extensively discussed and debated at the Third ATT PrepCom

What can we parliamentarians do during this critical stage? A stage which will likely determine, in large measure, the final complexion of the ATT itself?

a. We must immerse ourselves in the process - this we can most effectively do by actual attendance at the ATT PrepCom, absorbing the key issues, listening, and understanding better what are the different concerns and challenges

b. Having done so, and equipped with this 'intelligence' we need to ensure that our respective Parliaments, and relevant parliamentary committees, are properly seized of this issue - armed violence is a genuinely global problem.

Indeed, armed violence is, alas, no stranger to my own immediate region.

It is a particularly acute problem in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago and consumes vast quantities of precious public resources to contain it.

By addressing the scourge of armed violence head on - and the ATT will be an important vehicle to do this - we not only save countless lives, but we build prosperity through using these precious funds not on healthcare for the victims of such violence, but in ways which generate the productivity and growth of our countries.

We must, when we return to our respective countries, also seek appointments with relevant government Ministers to press home the importance and urgency of not only negotiating an ATT, but an ATT which has 'real teeth'.

I have a slight concern here that we do not set the bar too low, just because this will be the first Treaty of its kind.

While there will undoubtedly be a review mechanism in the final version of the Treaty, correcting Treaty shortcomings is an extremely difficult process, once a treaty is in place.

We have all seen this firsthand in the case of the Rome Statute of the ICC.

Lets get it right from the start.

We must aim high and we must aim early

c. Lastly, in this PrepCom stage, we must also take advantage of our presence here in New York not only to attend the ATT PrepCom and other side events, but I also strongly urge all of the Members of Parliament present here today, prior to their departure at the end of this week, to set up a brief appointment with their Ambassadors here.

The purpose of this short meeting would be to express appreciation for facilitating your attendance at the ATT, but also, to indicate to her or him the importance of your government taking seriously the concerns of all, including civil society

On this, I also want to acknowledge our good friends and partners from the Control Arms Coalition with us here today.

I understand that you have prepared a brief summary of the main issues that you and we believe still need to be addressed.

You have kindly given me a copy of this most helpful summary and I would ask our PGA Staff to make sure that all of the MPs here have several copies of it so that we can give a copy of it to our respective Ambassadors to the UN when we meet them informally during the course of the coming days.

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2. The second stage is immediately after the Treaty text itself is agreed.

We all hope this will be in July next year - 2012 at the final session, once the PrepComs have concluded.

At that stage in this sequence or series of events, as I have described them - a different, but no less pivotal role is triggered for us lawmakers - to actively advocate in our respective countries for ratification.

If I may say so, many of us have already carried this exercise out, with very considerable success, in the context of the Rome Statute of the ICC and other regional and international treaties. We have a track record of which to be proud.

I hope, therefore, that we in PGA can again be at the forefront of efforts to ensure an essential international Treaty enters into force as soon as possible once it is established, through our individual pro-ratification efforts, and also thereafter so that it can really become a benchmark, truly universal treaty.

Legitimacy comes from universality.

There is no reason, why we cannot achieve the same dramatic results when it comes to the ATT.

In some countries it is necessary to introduce legislation in advance of ratification to ensure conformity with an international treaty.

So some of us will have to turn our attention to this task in tandem with and at the same time as our advocacy for ATT ratification.

I am confident that our expert colleagues in the PGA Secretariat and Control Arms will be on hand to assist us on this - where this is needed.

PAUSE

3. The third and final stage is for those of us who come from countries where implementing legislation is not necessary in advance of ratification of a treaty.

With ratification in those countries, this triggers another role for MPs in those countries, which includes my own.

Once we have ratified, we parliamentarians must recognize that our job does not end there. If we ratify a treaty we must also show good faith and implement it too. Not to do so sends a most unfortunate signal to other States parties. Again, our colleagues in the PGA Secretariat and Control Arms will be on hand to assist un in this endeavour.

PAUSE

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the end of October of this year PGA will hold its 33rd Annual Forum in Sri Lanka.

The theme of this year's Forum will be 'Armed Violence and Development'.

I am particularly pleased, therefore, to have Hon. Thilanga Sumathipala MP with us here today.

And we hope that at least some of you will also be able to participate.

Our deliberations at this Workshop will provide a most useful input into the preparations for this Annual Forum.

Please allow me to conclude by also acknowledging the kind core support provided to PGA by Sweden and Denmark which has also been instrumental in enabling us to play the decisive role that we must play in supporting a strong Arms Trade Treaty.

Thank you.