MAPPING ILLICIT ARMS FLOWS IN AFRICA - INCEPTION MEETING

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OPENING STATEMENT BY DR. ADMORE KAMBUDZI
AG. DIRECTOR, AU PEACE AND SECURITY DEPARTMENT
Distinguished representatives of Regional Economic Communities and Regional Bodies,
Distinguished representatives of the United Nations and research bodies,
Esteemed colleagues from the Small Arms Survey,
Ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, I wish to express the AU’s thanks and appreciation to the Small Arms Survey for their collaboration and for bringing their strong comparative advantage to benefit this important initiative. I also wish to thank all of your for joining us at this meeting and sharing your research, knowledge and perspectives on this important topic.

As you are aware, reliable research and analysis are critical to understanding the extent and nature of the arms proliferation problem and its impact, and subsequently inform policy-making. This is enshrined in several of the regional and international instruments, including the United Nations Program of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. The PoA urges States, regional, and international organizations to develop and support action-oriented research aimed at facilitating greater awareness and better understanding of the nature and scope of the problems associated with the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

In fact, for many years, the policy dialogue at the level of the United Nations has been greatly aided and enriched by research undertaken by inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, including those present here today. However, despite the wealth of research and analysis that exists, there are many persistent gaps that undermine the contribution of research to sound policy responses and measurable program outcomes. This has resulted in the adoption of policies and decisions that are based on an outdated understanding of the sources of illicit weapons, their trade patterns, and the control deficits that allow their diversion and circulation. Moreover, in the absence of data and evidence to measure results, programs are commonly designed with a focus on processes and outputs rather than impact.

Two main problems plague progress in establishing an evidence-based approach to illicit arms control in Africa. The first is the slow translation of research into practice. Often times, there is a disconnect between those who produce research and those who are positioned to implement its findings due to the difference in the environments and levels at which they respectively operate. This is in addition to the speed with which governmental policies are formulated and adopted, which often outpaces that of research.

The second problem is the absence of comprehensive and consistent mechanisms for data gathering at the national and regional levels. Data required for evidence-based policy development should ideally be collected from various sources to provide a comprehensive view about the different aspects of the problem - including data on arms seizures, armed crimes and arms related injuries and deaths. A range of national stakeholders are typically involved in collecting such data, including customs and law enforcement agencies, health authorities,
statistics offices and the intelligence community. But despite their importance, few Member States have instituted reporting protocols to monitor arms trafficking and armed violence.

These two problems combined undercuts the ability of national and regional stakeholders to identify priorities, design responsive and targeted programs, and evaluate their impact, resulting in the misallocation or suboptimal use of the already scarce resources.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

On 29 March 2016, the Peace and Security Council of the African Union held its 584th meeting in which it reaffirmed its intention to undertake all steps necessary to prevent the illicit transfers and sales of arms and ammunition to non-state armed groups, terrorist groups and criminals. In this regard, the Council requests the AU Commission to work in close collaboration with Member States, the United Nations, RECs, and other relevant entities, to provide regular briefings on the illicit flows of arms and ammunition into conflict zones and provide practical recommendations.

Additionally, the 28th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union, held in January 2017, adopted the AU master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by year 2020. The Roadmap, among other things, requests the AU Commission, RECs and regional bodies to collect, verify and provide information to the PSC on those involved in illicit arms trade. The Council also called for enhancing the capacity of Member States to identify, seize and destroy illicit weapons, as well as identify and sever links between suppliers and recipients of illicit arms.

Pursuantly, the AU Commission is launching a project to map illicit arms flows across the continent. The aim of the project is to generate concrete data to reveal patterns and trends in arms and ammunition inflows, diversion and circulation, and gaps in control measures. The resulting study will enable AU policy organs and Member States prevent the flow of arms and ammunition into conflict zones, implement evidence-based policies and better measure progress and impact.

In this respect, the study will compile and take stock of existing research and analysis produced by RECs, regional bodies, the UN, and research agencies. The project will further undertake new targeted research that will contribute to filling outstanding knowledge gaps.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

This inception meeting is the first steps of this important project as participating experts and practitioners will be expected to assess the current state of knowledge on illicit arms flows in Africa, refine the scope of the mapping study, agree on how to address the gaps in knowledge and agree on the process for validating the findings of the study and the development of the recommendations. It is critical that this project produces a sound study.
with concrete and digestible findings as well as practical and applicable recommendations. Such a study will also serve as a baseline for continued assessment and updates to measure the impact of our collective efforts and ensure that policy responses and interventions are continuously adapted to address the emerging threats and realities on the ground.

In concluding, I wish to thank you once again for your participation and contribution to this effort and wish you fruitful deliberations and a successful outcome.

Thank you for your kind attention.