Dr. Tarek,

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Watching the news on TV we see tanks moving into cities and aircrafts dropping bombs; stopping nuclear proliferation is a big issue. So you might ask: what about small arms and light weapons (SALW), do they really pose a severe threat?

One thing that surprises me is that the vast majority of SALW are in the hands of civilians - that is around 650 out of 875 million! What do you make of that? Why are small arms so popular? Yes, they are cheap, easy to use, easy to hide, and in many societies widely accepted as a means of self-defense. But what about countries with a low crime rate and an efficient police force? Nobody needs a gun for self-defense there.

My gut feeling is that psychology also plays very significant role. Many people feel “good” with a gun in their hand, more respected and more powerful, it seems to boost their self-esteem. These are not rational arguments so there’s not much use arguing against them. So what we need is action – and fortunately that’s what you came here for. Thank you for your commitment to this important topic!

Let me come back to why SALW are so dangerous:

First, the supply of SALW is difficult to monitor due to illegal production and illicit trade – also across borders.
Second, the storage of small arms and the necessary ammunition is often insufficiently secured, and therefore they become easy targets for theft.

Third, the deadly effects of SALW and their ammunition are often underestimated, lowering inhibitions to use them.

Forth, after conflict, SALW are often not collected and left behind, posing a risk to civilians. Left-over stocks in the wrong hands can be used in renewed conflicts, tribal tensions, terrorist activities, and criminal or vigilante activities.

For these reasons, Germany is very involved in addressing the threats of proliferation and use of small arms and light weapons. Let me name but a few examples of German projects for illustration:

- In the area of capacity building, we support regional and national training courses at the International Peace Support Training Centre (IPSTC) in Nairobi for people dealing with these problems in practice.
- In order to ensure effective life-cycle management, we have supported countries like Mali and DRC in securing their existing storage facilities, and we have supported Nigeria and Sudan in marking government and civilian weapons.
- In Mali we have also assisted in the destruction of surplus stocks of arms and ammunition.

As you can see, our priority in this field lies in the Greater Sahel Region, which witnesses high levels of illicit arms being transported across leaky national borders and into the hands of non-state armed groups.

Let me come to an essential part of the German commitment, the reason for coming here today: This session constitutes the first meeting of the Technical Working Group on Physical Security and Stockpile Management (PSSM-TWG). It is part of the ongoing AU-German Project on Enhanced SALW Control and Physical Security and Stockpile Management in the Greater Sahel region. This project is based on the partnership between the

a) AU Defense and Security Division,
b) the Conventional Arms Control Division of the German Foreign Office, and
c) the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC), which was shaped within
the context of Germany’s G7 presidency in 2015.

The main aim of this partnership is to improve the coordination of small arms
control initiatives and to foster joint action to prevent leakage/illicit transfer of
SALW from state stockpiles.

In addition, the AU-German project aims to better match the needs of Greater
Sahel states with the resources of donors.

You have a big agenda for the two days ahead:

This meeting of the Technical Working Group will hopefully produce conclusions
and recommendations which can be presented at a planned meeting of donors in
Berlin in later this year.

Moreover, this meeting is supposed to be a first step towards the establishment
of minimum standards for the many different types of PSSM training courses
currently on offer.

The work of the PSSM Technical Working Group over the next two days will also
be a first attempt to develop sustainable ways to source, screen, and train African
PSSM experts for deployment through an African Union roster. This would
provide the AU with the necessary skills to respond to requests for technical
PSSM assistance by member states and lay the foundation for a close cooperation
across Africa.

In this vein I wish you fruitful discussions over the next two days and all the
necessary success to fulfill these high expectations set in your work. Germany is
proud to be a partner of these deliberations and we look forward to a continued
partnership with the AU and all of you.

Thank you very much for your attention.