6 July 2000

Original: English

Disarmament Commission
2000 substantive session
New York, 26 June-7 July 2000

Destruction of surplus, confiscated or collected weapons as a practical confidence-building measure in the field of conventional arms

Working paper submitted by South Africa

Introduction

Given the interrelationship between the availability of uncontrolled surplus, collected or confiscated arms as a source of illicit weapons and its direct impact on confidence and security among States, in particular neighbouring States, the destruction of such weapons linked to a voluntary reporting system and a mechanism through which States could obtain assistance in the safeguarding and destruction of these weapons would serve as a very practical and tangible confidence-building measure in the field of conventional arms.

In this regard, the report of the Secretary-General on small arms (A/52/298) recommended, among other things, that States exercise restraint on the transfer of surplus small arms manufactured solely for possession and use by the military and police forces, and that all States consider the possibility of destroying all surplus small arms. It is also recalled that the General Assembly, in its resolution 54/54 R, entitled "Illicit traffic in small arms", encouraged States in a position to do so to take appropriate national measures to destroy surplus confiscated or collected small arms and light weapons, and to provide, on a voluntary basis, information to the Secretary-General on types and quantities destroyed. In its resolution 54/54 H, entitled "Consolidation of peace through practical disarmament measures", the General Assembly encouraged Member States, including the Group of interested States, to lend their support to the Secretary-General in responding to requests by Member States to collect and destroy small arms and light weapons in post-conflict situations.

Destruction of surplus, confiscated or collected weapons: the South African experience

As part of the South African Government's strategy to curtail the excessive and destabilizing accumulation of small arms, the Government announced on 19 February 1999 its decision to destroy surplus and confiscated weapons rather than sell them. A project to destroy a total number of 262,667 weapons and parts with a calibre of less than 12.7 millimetres (mm) by means of fragmentation, code-named Operation Mouflon, commenced on 6 July 2000, with the destruction of approximately 63,000 weapons; a list showing the types and quantities of the total amount of weapons to be destroyed during Operation Mouflon is attached. The weapons to be destroyed during the Operation became redundant and/or obsolete due to the availability of more advanced technology, or were confiscated by the South African Defence Force during military operations. Strict physical security, verifying and accounting procedures are being implemented to ensure the smooth progress of the Operation. The

commencement of the destruction process was witnessed by the media and a video tape of the destruction process will eventually be made available.

The destruction of these weapons is in line with international efforts to address the problem of small arms proliferation. It follows on the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's above-mentioned 1997 report on small arms. It is also in line with the provisions of the South African-inspired General Assembly resolution entitled "Illicit trafficking in small arms".

The destruction of all redundant/confiscated small arms and spare parts in the possession of the South African National Defence Force followed a comprehensive study on the legal, technical, safety and financial implications involved in Operation Mouflon. After securing sufficient funds to cover the cost of destroying these weapons (estimated at close to 2 million rand (R)), including through a contribution by the Norwegian Government of 520,000 Norwegian kroner, the Government signed contracts with two destruction companies in Benoni and Port Elizabeth.

Operation Mouflon consists of three phases:

(a) **The preparation phase**: the design of accounting and verification procedures, as well as the appointment of personnel to execute the verification and accounting process at the various depots where the weapons are stored;

(b) **The execution phase**: the verification and accounting of weapons to be destroyed, the transporting thereof to the destruction facilities, and the physical destruction of the weapons and spare parts;

(c) **The finalization phase**: the finalization of outstanding computer accounting transactions, as well as the auditing of the whole process.

In addition to the destruction of arms under Operation Mouflon, the South African Police Service has since 1997 destroyed several tons of surplus small arms. On 6 October 1997, 20 tons of firearms were melted down, including 4,504 confiscated firearms, *inter alia*, pistols, revolvers, rifles, shotguns and home-made firearms with a commercial value in excess of R2 million. The South African Police Service has subsequently also destroyed an additional 11 tons of confiscated ammunition and 10 tons of confiscated small arms, 9 tons of obsolete/outdated ammunition and 20 tons of redundant/obsolete small arms. Furthermore, South Africa and Mozambique have since the signing of a bilateral agreement in 1995 embarked on a programme of tracing and destroying uncontrolled arms caches, code-named Operation Rachel. These weapons are imperilling the lives and livelihoods of many, including civilians and those responsible for the maintenance of law and order in the Southern African region. To date, Operation Rachel has resulted in the destruction of more than 14,000 weapons, more than 35 million rounds of ammunition, 6,491 mines of various kinds and more than 16,000 mortars and other projectiles.

Destruction of surplus, confiscated or collected weapons as a practical confidence-building measure in the field of conventional arms

Given its practical experience in this regard, South Africa proposes that practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms should include the following:

(a) The destruction of surplus arms no longer in use by government forces, or their confiscation and collection in post-conflict situations. States in a position to do so should be invited to lend their support in responding to requests by Member States to collect and destroy surplus, confiscated or collected arms. Not only would the destruction of such obsolete weapons be a practical and tangible measure to promote confidence among States in the field of conventional arms but it would also limit the traffic in illicit arms;

(b) States should provide, on a voluntary basis, information to the Secretary-General on types and quantities of arms destroyed. This information could be annually circulated by the Secretary-General among States. South Africa has already provided information in this regard;

(c) The Secretary-General should be invited to provide advisory assistance to Member States, at their request, in safeguarding and improving control over their surplus or obsolete weapons stockpiles, and in the destruction of such weapons.

Attachment

List of weapons to be destroyed during Operation Mouflon

Description	*Quantity*
7.62 mm R-1 rifles	198 506
7.62 mm R-1 rifles for paratroopers	1 326
7.62 mm R-1 heavy-barrel rifles	2 914
7.62 mm M-1 FN rifles	3 708
R-2	12 237
Bren light machine guns	3 637
Vickers machine guns	2 256
12.7 mm Browning machine guns	412
Uzzi sub-machine guns	1 259
Other small calibre weapons (e.g., AK-47 rifles)	36 412
Total	**262 667**