

**Statement by Ambassador Munir Akram, Permanent Representative of
Pakistan to the UN, at the Open debate of the Security Council on the
question of “Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons, and the
phenomenon of mercenaries: threats to peace and security in West Africa”,
18 March, 2003**

1. Let me at the outset welcome you, Mr. Foreign Minister, for your presence amongst us again today to preside over the debate on the “Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons, and the phenomenon of mercenaries: threats to peace and security in West Africa”. I would also like to extend a very warm welcome to the other distinguished Ministers and representatives of the West African States, the representatives of the AU and ECOWAS.

2. I would like to felicitate Guinea and Ambassador Mamady Traore and you, Mr. President, for the initiative in holding this meeting.

3. It is alarming that 8 million illicit small arms are in circulation in West Africa. Intra-state conflicts have created staggering demand for small arms, and have contributed to the continued proliferation of bandits, rebel groups, mercenaries, child soldiers and militia in the entire sub-region. As succinctly put by the Secretary General in his opening remarks, these problems sustain conflicts, hinder development, undermine human rights and humanitarian law and exacerbate violence especially against women and children.

Mr. President,

4. Pakistan was affected by the problem of small arms in the context of the Afghanistan war which began in 1979. Two years ago we adopted a comprehensive strategy to control and eliminate this problem. We have had considerable although not yet complete success. Our campaign against illicit arms is continuing. We would be happy to share our experiences with the friendly countries.

5. We feel that problems faced by West Africa are complex and multifaceted, affecting stability and peace within and outside individual countries. We need to address peace and stability of the entire sub-region, not one country at a time. We agree with the assessment of the Secretary General that efforts must be made to remove tensions between the concerned countries and also to find ways to collectively address their problems. To this effect, we fully support the efforts that are being made in ECOWAS and urge the United Nations to take a more pro-active role to find a comprehensive solution to West Africa's problems.

Mr. President,

6. Efforts must focus on the implementation of the Programme of Action adopted by the UN Conference on Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects. We also endorse several of the recommendations in the Secretary General's Report on small arms (S/2002/1053) submitted to the Security Council last year. With the adoption of the Bamako Declaration on the Illicit Proliferation, Circulation and Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons on 1 December 2000, for the first time, the African Union has articulated a continent-wide strategy for tackling the illicit small arms problem. Similarly, ECOWAS' renewal of its moratorium on the import, export and manufacture of small arms and light weapons last year is a sincere effort in addressing the issue.

Mr. President,

7. The ECOWAS Moratorium can be strengthened through the recommendations contained in the Draft Presidential Statement, including transparency, better end-user certificates, effective implementation of UN sanctions and well coordinated DDR programmes.

8. Arms producing and exporting countries should enact stringent laws and regulations to ensure that their exports to West Africa do not contribute to destabilizing the region. The implementation of DDR programmes in the affected countries of the region need generous financial support of the donor community.

Mr President,

9. We are facing what one could call a series of complex crises in West Africa and elsewhere. It is obvious that only a comprehensive approach, which takes into account socio-economic, political, security and other factors, can address effectively the problems associated with small arms and light weapons. The international community should help in dealing with the complex causes of instability in the West African region. In particular, the economic and social problems afflicting the region must be tackled through comprehensive support for development – market access, debt relief, enhanced ODA, Human Resources Development and a focused effort to eradicate HIV/AIDS.

10. We at the UN and specially in the Security Council, need to devise new composite methods and approaches which draw together all those who can contribute to solutions for these complex crises. I suggest we discuss this in our Ad Hoc Working Group on Conflict prevention and resolution in Africa.

I thank you, Mr. President.