



PARLIAMENTARY FORUM
ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

SPEECH

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“Parliamentary Action on Small Arms – the illicit transfer of small arms to Latin America”

Key Note Speaker Session II: Consequences for security in Latin America

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you all and thank all the parliamentarians present for their participation in this meeting.

Latin America is, without a doubt, one of the regions most affected by the terrible consequences that easy access to weapons imposes on society. Therefore we strongly appreciate this opportunity for dialogue.

Let me start by giving a brief introduction to the organisation which I, as well as some of my fellow colleagues here today, represent.

The Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons was established as a platform for exchange and parliamentary action in the field of small arms and light weapons and dates back to 1999 when it was officially formed in the Congress of Deputies of Spain in 2002. It is the only international network of parliamentarians dedicated specifically to issues related to arms control, disarmament and the prevention of gun violence.

The problem of small arms and light weapons must be analysed holistically, acknowledging its complexity and regional particularities as well as the various levels of intervention and action.

The small arms situation is certainly not the same in Central America, which shows rates of 29 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants and where 77% of these crimes are committed with firearms, compared to the situation in Western Europe, with only 3 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, of which less than 20% are committed with firearms.

The problems which arise from the poor manufacturing of firearms, lack of control of exports as well as criteria for granting licenses, stockpile management and the reduction of surpluses are



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indeed areas where The United States, as well as other core countries, play an important part. This will undoubtedly have implications on security in various other regions of the world.

Problems related to small arms can be seen as a cycle that covers production, management of stocks, destruction of surpluses and private transfers. Transfers can be distinguished between those that are legal, irresponsible as well as those which form part of the illicit market. These are elements that are found on the so called 'supply side'. The consequences of the availability of arms, which fuel conflicts and crime; cause violations of human rights; impact on public health and hinder development; can be associated with the "demand side" of the problem. This requires a comprehensive approach, trying to break the cycle in which causes and consequences are re-created in a spiral which needs to be stopped.

I come from a region of the world where problems of insecurity, firearms and crime are of prime concern to its citizens. "The Latin American Barometer 2008" is a public opinion survey conducted since 1995 in 18 Latin American countries, representing the opinions of over 400 million people. According to this report, for the first time since the survey was initiated, Latin Americans consider crime to be the most serious of problems, pushing unemployment and other economic issues into second place.

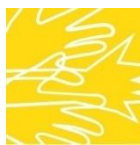
In 1995, only 5% of Latin Americans considered crime to be a serious problem, while in 2008, that concern grew to 18% of the people in the region. In countries such as Venezuela, 57% of the population recognizes crime to be the biggest problem affecting their country.

In this context, the issue of public safety is no longer only an issue on the political and parliamentary agenda of Latin Americans. Instead it has become a central problem for which the lack of a solution will involve much more than the failure of a single policy sector by affecting the governance of our countries and jeopardizing the consolidation of democratic institutions.

In this regard, the "Latin American Barometer 2008" report provides some enlightening information. One of the themes of the consultation analyses which rights and freedoms of the Latin American people are guaranteed by democracies in their countries. While religious freedoms and labour policies are at the top of the positive responses, the perception that democracy provides protection against crime appears last on the list. This is very serious. When people think that a democratic system does not guarantee an effective response to the main problem in society it surely opens the door to authoritarian temptations.

We therefore hope that the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons, with its broad membership consisting of parliamentarians of various ideologies representing different countries and continents, can provide a visualization of the problem in all its comprehensiveness and various dimensions.

The Forum can, as we are doing today, establish an area for discussion and the exchange of experiences that can serve all in order to nurture the most important initiatives in these matters



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and update us on the ongoing processes. The Forum must set out positions on the diverse issues of small arms, in an attempt to contribute to an appropriate direction and development.

This will provide better tools to apply to our respective parliamentary discussions on these issues in the search to reach the necessary consensus within each country to make the legislative adjustments and harmonisations that these issues require.

Following the process of the development of a concrete Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) is without a doubt a priority area. We must be dynamic and in constant interaction with the UN Group of Governmental Experts which has been working on the issue as well as with the relevant authorities of each of our countries in order to achieve the results desired as well as making sure that the criteria and parameters that govern it are the most appropriate.

The United States is, like the rest of the core countries, a major arms exporter, and we urge you to play an important role in this matter. Without support from the suppliers and their decision to adhere to strict rules governing transfers, the process is bound to fail or to become a mere declaration of principles.

Therefore, I am sure that the presentations and discussions that will take place at this meeting will undoubtedly constitute an essential contribution to the work to be done on these issues.

Meetings like this should serve to define the objectives to be achieved, as well as to identify which programmes and initiatives are needed to achieve them.