



PARLIAMENTARY FORUM
ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

Intervention by Dr. Manuel de Araujo, Vice President of the Parliamentary Forum during the Inter-Parliamentary Seminar, 27 April 2010, Washington D.C, USA, US Congress

Honorable Members of the US Congress
Honorable Members of Parliaments in Latin America
Dear Participants

Let me on behalf of the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons express my strong appreciation for the possibility to address you and to take part in this important gathering of parliamentarians, in the search for peaceful and secure communities.

I am particularly grateful to Congressman James McGovern, who has worked with us and make this seminar possible. A dialogue with their colleagues in Washington on half to best jointly address a common problem, has been a priority for many years for our members in Latin America.

The Parliamentary Forum is a young organization of parliamentarians worldwide concerned with the un-controlled proliferation of small arms and the effects these weapons have on building and sustaining prosper and secure societies.

The work we are doing originates from the aftermath of the hurricane Mitch in Central America in the 90ies. At that time, it became clear to many actors in the international community that the proliferation of small arms was a major obstacle to re-building the societies. A reality that had been clear to parliamentarians in these countries for many years.

Spanish and Swedish members of parliaments took the initiative to form a network to offer political, legal and financial support to their colleagues in Central America, how to deal with the problem. This concrete act of solidarity was strongly appreciated, and based on that experience the need to have a more permanent network of parliamentarians was identified.

Gradually the work grew, geographically as well as qualitatively. The Forum became a membership organization of parliamentarians, able to speak for and work with members in many parts of the world. Gradually the whole of Latin America was covered and a growing interest from African parliamentarians to participate emerged. At present, the Forum has 200 members in 60 countries and the bulk of the membership is in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe. It is the Forum's ambition to further expand to Asia as well as the Middle East, and ultimately engage more members from all the regions of the globe.



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The method of bringing parliamentarians from different countries and continents together to share perspectives and learning from each other is crucial when dealing with issues of peace and international security.

Parliaments have a key role in peace making, promoting and informing public debates, collaborating in policy development and implementation, monitoring and criticising government initiatives, and controlling the budget allocations of the public security sector.

Parliaments are the only bodies with authority to create and reform legislation and to ratify international treaties. As democratically elected representatives, parliamentarians have unique access to the public space and as such a possibility to create debate and stimulate public opinion. Parliaments also serve as links with civil society and governments, thus assuring both the legality and legitimacy of policy initiatives.

The role of parliamentarians is thus imperative in promoting security, and in particular I would like to stress our role in fighting illicit arms trade.

Since these weapons easily cross borders it immediately becomes a problem of international concern and, as such, requires commitments at a national, regional and international level.

The Parliamentary Forum is of the view that, in order to address the issue, efforts should be made to tackle both the supply of and the demand for weapons and as parliamentarians we have every tool available to do so. Alongside the harmonization of national laws and regulation at an international level, governments also need to address inequalities and poverty, improve public security and crime prevention, as well as undertake criminal justice reform and democratic community policing in order to help reduce armed violence, and thus the demand for weapons and illicit transfers.

Moderator,

Armed violence is a complex issue, which makes it necessary for parliamentarians to work with all their available tools.

This, I believe, is the main reason while there is a growing interest among parliamentarians to work with small arms. And an interest from a variety of parliamentarians – women and men, from the political right, left and centre. From small countries and large countries.



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The illicit arms trade today does not recognize borders. It is necessary for the measures to deal with illicit arms trade, to go further beyond borders as well.

I look forward to a most fruitful exchange during today's meeting

I thank you for your attention.