

**United Nations Conference to Review Progress
Made in the Implementation of the
Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in
Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects
30 June 2006**

**Statement by David Penn
The British Shooting Sports Council**

Thank you Mr. President, it is an honour for my organization to address this august body.

I am the Secretary of the British Shooting Sports Council. The BSSC is an umbrella body, bringing together the major Associations for target shooting and quarry shooting to achieve consensus positions on issues affecting the shooting sports. It is a member of the World Forum. The aim and objective of the BSSC are to promote and safeguard the lawful use of firearms and air weapons for sporting and recreational purposes in the United Kingdom amongst all sections of society.

Having been involved with firearms and shooting for fifty years, shooting administration for forty years, firearms legislation for over thirty-five years, having had the care of one of Britain's major public collections of modern firearms at the Imperial War Museum for over thirty years and having served as Chairman of a Government appointed body, the Firearms Consultative Committee, I have formed opinions on firearms in civil society, the criminal misuse of firearms and small arms in conflict.

The civilian ownership and use of firearms for hunting, wildlife management, target shooting or collecting are remarkably safe activities. I have had more frights in a couple of hours driving on a crowded British motorway than in a lifetime of being around firearms. The insurance market thinks shooters and shooting are safe too: as part of my membership of the British Association for Shooting and Conservation for an annual premium of only £9.50 (c. US\$17), I get public and products liability of £5,000,000 (c. US\$8,939,000) and employers liability of £10,000,000 (c. US\$17,878,000). From among its 123,000 members BASC receives less than 100 claims a year, mostly for damage to their property and for sums well under £3,000 (c. US\$5,365).

The legitimacy of shooting as a leisure activity and an essential component of wildlife management is becoming increasingly recognised. Within Britain, in 2005 the Labour Party published a 'Charter for Shooting' which endorses self-regulation, recognises that there is no connection between legitimate sporting shooting and street crime, and encourages the responsible development of shooting for young people. It similarly recognises the benefit to the national heritage of firearms collecting. At European Community level the legitimate use of firearms is also acknowledged, for instance in the permitting of hunting in some of the European Union's Natura 2000 network of conservation sites and the recognizing of hunting, target shooting and weapons heritage in the 1991 EC Directive on control of the acquisition and possession of weapons.

Civilian firearms owners have every reason for pride in their activities. We are a part of society, and share concerns over the misuse of firearms in crime or conflict. We definitely do not appreciate any attempt to marginalise us, or to link us and our activities to crime or conflict, and spend much more time than we should have to in rebutting such suggestions. Indeed, for reasons of both self interest and public spiritedness, we see the legitimate shooting community as a willing, knowledgeable and committed contributor to mitigating the evils of violent crime and conflict.

The Swiss Small Arms Survey tells us that there are more firearms in civilian hands than in the hands of states. The civilian firearms owner has a strong attachment to his or her guns, and, whatever you might think about such emotions, neither the shooter nor his firearms is about to go away.

Far too much time in the debate on firearms control, nationally and internationally, is taken up by simplistic sloganeering and confrontational position taking by zealots on both sides of the debate. This is fruitless and a waste of time. I am a pragmatist who prefers to talk and to seek areas of common ground. For many years I had above my desk the wise words "The Perfect is the Enemy of the Good". Perfection is rarely achievable this side of Heaven, so let us aim for some sensible Good soon. In my view we can achieve real progress in the short term if we concentrate in the first instance on controlling the movement of military small arms and light weapons. We would also progress faster and in greater harmony if the United Nations would take the steps of recognising the legitimacy of sporting shooting and firearms collecting and accommodating these activities in future legislation.

In closing, I would also stress that legislation at national and international levels can only be a part of the solution. Other aspects are the need to control or destroy unwanted stockpiles of small arms, light weapons and ammunition, and the provision of education and realistic economic prospects in conflict areas. All these are, laudably, in hand to a greater or lesser degree. To these I would add one more essential measure: the need to recognise that in many cultures there is a strong desire by many to possess weapons. It is better to establish ways in which this desire can be safely accommodated within the law and society than to drive firearms ownership underground, where neither the firearm nor its owner is susceptible to control, where it is no longer possible to influence good practice such as safe handling and secure storage, and where the risk is run of feeding crime and low intensity conflict.

Better some real reduction of crime and conflict than none. The Perfect is the Enemy of the Good.

DJP 24 May 2006