

**United Nations Third Biennial Meeting of States to Consider 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 (BMS3), 14-18 July 2008.**

**16 July 2008**

**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 for the second time.

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.

In my 2006 address, I stressed that civilian shooting sports are safe, and that their legitimacy was increasingly recognized politically, both within the UK and at an European Union level.

Today I wish to illustrate how long-established the shooting sports have become, and how well-embedded they are in the culture of the United Kingdom. This picture is mirrored widely across Europe, among many Commonwealth nations and in North America. While it is true that there were legislative attempts in England to restrict the use of firearms for sporting purposes to the upper reaches of society during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, nevertheless the rise of an educated and prosperous middle class soon saw hunting with firearms spread through society and a growing interest in target shooting.

Britain's National Rifle Association was founded in November 1859 with much support from the Royal Family and individuals of political influence. The highest honour in British target shooting continues to be to win the Queen's Prize, competed for annually. In 1900 the Prime Minister Lord Salisbury stated that his intention was that 'a rifle should be kept in every cottage in the land'. Today there are 1,000 target shooting clubs in the United Kingdom. 150,000 people shoot clay targets on a regular basis, while 250,000 people regularly enjoy target shooting with rifles, muzzle loading pistols and air weapons. The British are rather good at it. 23 of the UK's 116 medals in the 2006 Commonwealth Games were for shooting, the second highest medal-winning discipline for UK athletes, exceeded only by swimming with 24.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the hunting of game also becoming increasingly accessible to those with disposable incomes, and deer stalking and shooting in Scotland were

popularised by Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert, the Prince Consort. By 1870, shooting was so popular that it became worth taxing, via a Gun Licence available from the Post Office. Game shooting, along with hunting on horseback with hounds, has shaped much of Britain's countryside and contributed to its beauty and wildlife diversity. Hunting with firearms is a £1.6 billion industry in the United Kingdom, supporting 70,000 jobs. 480,000 people shoot game, wildfowl, pigeon and rabbits, accounting for just under 19 million head of game in 2004.

Britain's largest shooting organisation, the British Association for Shooting & Conservation (BASC), had its beginnings one hundred years ago in 1908, with the founding of the Wildfowlers Association of Great Britain and Ireland. In 1981 this became BASC. Still growing, in 2008 it has 127,000 members and 100 staff. Although its interests are much wider than field sports alone, the Countryside Alliance, founded in 1997 and with 407,000 members has proved not only one of the strongest supporters of shooting, but also one of its most effective advocates, for instance through its 'Game to Eat' campaign which has boosted the appreciation of the healthy virtues of game meat among the population at large.

There is little media interest in the legitimate, non-military use of firearms. Target shooting is not a spectator sport with a huge 'fan' base susceptible to economic exploitation. Shooting is, however, a major participation sport in many parts of the world and the reason it attracts so little media interest is because it is conducted so responsibly. The Swiss Small Arms Survey tells us that civilians own around 650 million firearms world-wide. The hunter or target shooter poses no threat. As a law-abiding citizen, he or she does deserve consideration by the state and by the United Nations. Any measure to control the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons should incorporate positive measures to ensure the continuing ability of the legitimate civilian firearms trade to supply its very significant customer base world-wide, and the equally important right of the private citizen to travel internationally with his or her firearms for legitimate sporting and cultural purposes.

Civilian sport shooting and firearms collecting organisations were active during the European Parliament's 2007 consideration of Amendments to the 1991 EU Directive on the control of the acquisition and possession of weapons. A number of proposed Amendments, particularly regarding marking and tracing, were neither proportionate nor practicable and were of doubtful utility. The experience and detailed technical knowledge of the shooting and collecting organizations assisted greatly in improving the proposals, and I commend to you the consultation process incorporated within the European Parliamentary system. Shooting and collecting organizations stand ready to continue to contribute their knowledge, expertise and experience to the UN process.

Thank you.