

June 2, 2006

The Honourable Peter MacKay, M.P.
Minister of Foreign Affairs
80 Wellington St.
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Fax: 613-941-6900

Re: UN Review Conference on Small Arms and Light Weapons, June 2006

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Commission on Justice and Peace of the Canadian Council of Churches to urge the Canadian Government to show leadership at the UN Small Arms Review Conference, June 26–July 7, 2006. The Conference will review States' progress implementing the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA) an agreement resulting from the first UN conference on small arms in 2001. Canada has been an active supporter of the international negotiations to date, mainly through the PoA process and regional initiatives. The Review Conference provides a key opportunity for concrete action to control the proliferation and misuse of these weapons.

Today, small arms and light weapons threaten human security in virtually every country in the world. Every day newspapers, radio, television, and the Internet bring fresh stories of gun-related injuries and deaths. No nation is immune from the debilitating economic and social impact of gun violence, Canada included. The lack of global controls on this trade and the patchwork of insufficient national arms control laws mean that illicit gun-runners can easily ply their trade. As witnessed by the incidents of violence in our urban centres the problem with illegal weapons smuggled over the border and used to perpetrate heinous crimes needs to be addressed. When Canadians are killed, clergy often conduct the memorial services. When they are maimed, congregations comfort the family and friends who survive.

Our church partners in Africa, Asia, and Latin America struggle to address the violence that is heightened by small arms. There are over 600 million small arms—from handguns to AK-47 assault rifles to shoulder-fired missiles—in worldwide circulation: one for every ten people alive. Every year, hundreds of thousands of lives are lost to gun violence whether in situations of armed conflict or in countries and contexts unrelated to war. Over 200,000 people are victims of homicides and gun-related suicides each year. Direct gun related deaths in armed conflict situations are estimated at close to 100,000. Millions more are injured. Because of the havoc they wreak, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has labelled small arms “weapons of mass destruction.”

It is vital that Canada support the full implementation of the PoA to build a worldwide regulatory framework to control both the supply of and demand for small arms. Incredibly, there are now no internationally agreed regulations to ensure that small arms do not fall into the hands of criminals, and that these weapons are not exported to countries that are involved in armed conflict or in which the government is likely to use them to carry out human rights abuses.

In our view, it is essential that the June Review Conference result in States reaffirming their commitment to fully implement the PoA. Canada must work with likeminded States prior to and at the Review Conference to ensure it results in a strengthened PoA. To that end, we call on Canada to promote a Review Conference Outcome Document that calls on States to:

- adopt internationally agreed criteria or principles to regulate small arms transfers taking into account existing commitments under international humanitarian and human rights laws and include, but not be limited to, restrictions on exports if there is a likelihood they would contribute to armed conflict, human rights violations, humanitarian law violations, national or regional instability, or underdevelopment.
- note that an estimated 60% of the world’s small arms are possessed by civilians, and most illicit weapons start as legally produced and traded, and that regulation of these weapons is essential to ending the illicit trade and misuse of small arms. States must agree to strengthening and harmonizing national regulations on small arms that would include, but are not limited to, registration and licensing and the prohibition of possession of semi-automatic and automatic rifles, machine guns and all light weapons by those other than authorised entities;
- establish a rigorous mandate for the Group of Governmental Experts on arms brokering that will be established following the Review Conference to agree to common understandings of issues such as the definitions of brokers, brokering and brokering related activities, options for extraterritorial controls, and agreement to work towards a legally-binding instrument;

- continue to work towards greater recognition of the link between development and small arms control and request the UN Secretary-General to undertake a study to further explore this link;
- increase funding for small arms control initiatives, in particular, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs in countries emerging from armed conflict and improving funding coordination between states to ensure successful implementation of the PoA;
- include small arms as part of the UN Register of Conventional Arms to promote greater transparency;
- further encourage the inclusion of civil society as full partners in the implementation of the PoA.

We speak from the theological vision of our churches, and with the voice of common humanity, in seeking peace and security without resort to arms. The prophet Isaiah compels us to “beat swords into ploughshares.” We, and millions of people around the world, are counting on Canada’s strong voice in these deliberations on the issue of small arms.

Please be assured of our prayers as you undertake to fulfill your responsibilities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Hogeterp". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Mike Hogeterp
Chair
Commission on Justice and Peace

cc: The Honourable Bill Graham, Leader of the Liberal Party
The Honourable Gilles Duceppe, Leader of the Bloc Québécois
The Honourable Jack Layton, Leader of the New Democratic Party