



Fifth Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty

High Level Opening Panel

Delivered by: Nounou Booto Meeti

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Mr. President, Distinguished delegates,

I am honoured to be here with you today speaking on behalf of the Control Arms Coalition.

I take this opportunity to share with you my personal story, which I hope will illustrate the consequences of irresponsible arms transfers and the diversion of legitimate transfers.

In 1997, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, I escaped death by a whisker while waiting for a taxi, in one of the busy centers of Kinshasa, a young man belonging to the rebel group in power at the time, asked me, "You know since we took over power, women do not wear trousers anymore." I told him I did not know that. He then charged his weapon and pressed it to my belly. I could feel the cold metal against my abdomen.

Then he ordered me to take my trousers off. Looking around, everyone, from the women selling goods in the street to the people passing by on their way home from work, were visibly scared. As these rebels were not trained soldiers, we were not sure how they would react to my objection. So I did not think twice - I took them off and handed them to him. He took them and walked away from me, then shot one bullet towards the sky. That bullet was already in the chamber, a trigger-pull away. And it was meant for me. But I humiliated myself, walking naked on the street, to escape death.

A year later, while working as a judicial reporter, I witnessed the death sentence of a 13-year-old child by the military court.

That child was recruited as a child soldier by a rebel group and was assigned a guard, posted near a school. Every day, the child soldier could see other children playing football on the playground. One day, he put his Kalashnikov aside, removed the top of his military uniform, rolled up his trousers and joined the other kids. An International Committee of the Red Cross agent who was on site, approached the children and explained to the child soldier that he could not play football while being on duty. The child soldier begged him to allow him to play football for a little while,



but the Red Cross agent, knowing what the consequences could be for the child soldier if he was caught off duty, insisted that he could not play. So the child soldier picked up his Kalashnikov and shot the Red Cross agent.

At the time, I was a mother to a four-year-old boy. Just imagining the terror the other children felt made me fear for my child's safety and his future. I could also imagine the terror the Red Cross agent must have felt when he saw the gun pointed at him.

And the soldier himself. He was only a child. He needed a pen, pencil and a school uniform and a chance to play football with other children. Instead he was given a Kalashnikov, bullets and a military uniform. And that led to his own death, as he was sentenced to death by military court for the murder of the ICRC agent.

These two incidents and many others drove me to dedicate my life's work to strengthening arms control in DRC. Seven years later, after I moved to the United Kingdom, I was honoured to be part of the International Action Network on Small Arms and the Control Arms Coalition, working towards the adoption of a robust Arms Trade Treaty.

I am not sharing these experiences to gain your sympathy, but to inspire your action.

In the early 2000s, government officials, diplomats, campaigners, Nobel peace laureates, artists, celebrities and other stakeholders jointly called for an international legally binding instrument that will reduce the human suffering caused by the unchecked proliferation of arms.

Mr President, Distinguished delegates,

Now, we have a life-saving Treaty, the Arms Trade Treaty, that entered into force in December 2014. We are meeting today for the fifth Conference of States Parties.

And a lot of progress was made in this time. The Treaty has already surpassed the 100 States Parties mark. Many of these governments have taken concrete steps towards implementing the Treaty's provisions.

But it's not enough.

Not for the millions of civilians who suffer due to violence perpetrated by weapons transferred with great risk of being used to cause serious human suffering.

Not for the thousands of people who still live in fear of gender-based violence in 2019, nor the millions of children who continue to disproportionately bear the brunt of armed violence and warfare.



Right now, 420 million children¹ worldwide are living in conflict zones, where they face the daily danger of being killed or maimed, risk sliding into famine or seeing their education halted because it is too dangerous to go to school.²

Mr President, Distinguished delegates,

The suffering of millions of civilians as a result of illegal and irresponsible arms transfers should never be acceptable or inevitable.

On behalf of Control Arms, my organisation Center for Peace Security and Armed Violence Prevention (CPS-AVIP) and civilians suffering everywhere throughout the world, I call on you as States Parties and Signatories to the ATT to do the following:

Rigorously adhere to legal obligations under the Treaty in order to fulfil the Treaty's promise of reducing human suffering. By adopting the highest possible standards and by establishing rigorous structures to regulate the global arms trade, you can make a difference in the lives of millions of people around the world. It should not be necessary for civil society organisations to drag States into court to force compliance with obligations that were freely entered into.

Immediately cease arms transfers that fuel conflict, poverty, and violations of human rights and humanitarian law. Arms exports to the members of the Saudi Arabia and Emirati-led coalition that has inflicted an entirely preventable humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen are precisely the types of deals that the ATT was designed to prevent. Today there is no more egregious challenge to the Treaty's integrity.

Support transparency to help ensure accountability and prevent diversion of arms and ammunition. Public, comprehensive and timely reporting on exports and imports by States Parties can bring the arms trade out of the shadows, shed light on global arms transfers, increase accountability in arms-transfer decisions and serve as an important measure that can lead to mutual security and confidence-building among States Parties.

Leverage the ATT to protect against gender-based violence. States Parties must prioritize the prevention of GBV by developing robust risk assessment processes that provide specific training and resources related to gender-based violence and the Treaty. Control Arms welcomes the attention CSP5 has paid to discussion of GBV in the risk assessment and encourages you to continue this work after CSP5.

² Save the Children. Stop the War on Children Report 2019. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.stopwaronchildren.org/report.pdf>



Mr. President, civil society thanks you for the hard work you have already undertaken to prepare for this CSP. We look forward to this week and a future where the ATT is both universal and robustly implemented by all, for the benefit of all humanity.