

PRESS STATEMENT

ECOWAS Convention on Light Weapons

SMALL ARMS CONVENTION AT LAST!!!

We celebrate the signing of this convention because the control of small arms in West Africa now has a legal basis.

The West Africa Action Network on Small Arms (WAANSA) congratulates the Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS for signing a Convention on Light Weapons today.

Their political commitment, dedication and great efforts in the fight against the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the West African sub-region have culminated in this significant achievement, which comes just 12 days before the commencement of the 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 in New York.

This convention on Light Weapons now replaces the 1998 Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Light Weapons which was a voluntary response to the small arms menace, which resulted in the death of two million West Africans in the last decade. With this convention, WAANSA believes that national governments can now harmonise their domestic legislations on arms and ammunitions, cross-border activities with a view to enhancing peace, security and development in the sub- region.

WAANSA is particularly appreciative of the excellent collaboration it enjoys with ECOWAS Secretariat, especially His Excellency Dr. Mohamed ibn Chambas, the Executive Secretary and his able staff who work on the issues of peacekeeping, peace, defence and security. WAANSA hopes that national governments and civil society collaboration will continue to be effective in the

fight against the spread and devastating threats posed by the millions of small arms and light weapons circulating in the sub-region of West Africa.

Mr. Baffour Dokyi Amoa, the Chairman of WAANSA, calls on all peace and security loving peoples of the sub-region, else where in Africa and the world at large to ensure successful implementation and replication of the West Africa Convention on Light Weapons. In this regard, Mr. Amoa calls on governments of the sub-region to pay due attention to the convention and ensure speedy ratification by the various parliaments in the sub-region.

We salute our partners especially Oxfam and the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), for their support to civil society in the struggle for the transformation of the Moratorium into a regional legally-binding document. We pray for continued support.

Signed by
Afi Yakubu
(Secretary)

Notes for editors:

1. The 1998 ECOWAS Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Light Weapons was the world's first regional moratorium on these weapons. The ECOWAS Heads of State and Government agreed to transform the Moratorium into a binding legal instrument in 2003 in Dakar (Senegal).
2. The ECOWAS Secretariat appointed international consultants to transform the Moratorium into a legally-binding instrument. From 29-31 May, governmental experts agreed the draft ECOWAS Convention, at a meeting in Bamako (Mali). The experts submitted the draft Convention for consideration by Member States. ECOWAS Foreign Ministers agreed the draft Convention on 13 June at a meeting in Abuja (Nigeria), and submitted it to the heads of State and Government for consideration at their meeting on 14 June in Abuja, Nigeria.
3. The proposed Convention will prohibit all international transfers of small arms within the sub-region unless a Member State obtains an exemption from the ECOWAS Secretariat. The Secretariat will decide on an exemption based upon stringent criteria reflecting the obligations of all governments under relevant international law.
4. The proposed Convention will also harmonise laws on private gun possession across the sub-region, requiring users to obtain a renewable license from their national authorities, and requiring proof of a genuine need for gun possession.

