

COMBATTING THE ILLICIT TRADE IN SMALL ARMS **Let's make sure Canada is part of the solution**

By Peggy Mason

"A multitude of studies and reports conducted since the end of the Cold War show conclusively that the excessive and destabilizing accumulation and uncontrolled spread of small arms and light weapons has posed and continues to pose a major threat to international peace and security. . . Canada is in the forefront in calling attention to this urgent crisis and for calling upon the international community to take action."
from DFAIT website.

Canada has taken a leading role in the international effort to curb the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons (SALW). We were extremely active in the UN conference process that produced an agreed international Program of Action in July, 2000. Since then, we have participated fully in follow-up activities designed to encourage and assist states in implementing the many commitments contained in the Program of Action, such as bringing key international treaties against arms smuggling into effect and passing effective laws at home to control arms brokers. Canada's credibility as a leader in this important work would be significantly enhanced if we practised what we so ably preach. In short, there are currently at least three significant legislative gaps in Canada's own record of implementation:

1. We have yet to ratify and bring into force in Canada the Inter-american (OAS) convention against trafficking in firearms, signed away back in 1992. Canada has pledged to this, possibly by the end of 2002.
2. We have yet to ratify and bring into force in Canada the only global treaty against firearms trafficking--the Vienna Firearms Protocol, signed by Canada in June, 2001, and apparently to be ratified at the same time as the OAS convention; and
3. Canada has yet to introduce domestic legislation to effectively regulate arms brokers, as we undertook to do in Section II, paragraph 14, of the UN Program of Action. Regarding this commitment, there has been no public statement of when or how Canada intends to comply.

(As a matter of record, Canada has yet to sign even such an important treaty as the Law of the Sea, one that even the United States has signed.)

There is every reason to assume that Canada is deeply committed to the full implementation of the UN Program of Action. But the legislative calendar seems always to be a crowded one. Let us help ensure that our government honors its international

pledges by letting our elected representatives know that we expect concrete action, not just words. Urge the new Foreign Affairs Minister, Bill Graham, and your local MP and the Prime Minister himself to make sure that Canada is UNSALW Program of Action-compliant by the end of 2002.

Internet Links:

Hon. Bill Graham: <http://www.dfait.gc.ca/dfait/ministers/graham-e.asp>

Rt. Hon. Jean Chretien: <http://pm.gc.ca>

UN Website on Small Arms and Light Weapons:
<http://www.un.org/Dpts/dda/CAB/smallarms/>

NGO International Action Network on Small Arms: <http://www.iansa.org/>

Peggy Mason was the Canadian Ambassador for Disarmament for the period 1989-1994.