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Statement to the plenary
Arms Trade Treaty Diplomatic Conference
11 July 2012

Dear Delegates,

To tell you the truth, I am afraid.

I am afraid because we've come so close to changing the course of history and there is chance we might fail to use this opportunity. I am afraid, not for myself but for the men, women, boys and girls who will continue to suffer if go on without effective rules to regulate the arms trade.

I am afraid to hear statements that would shoot down the adoption of a robust treaty. I have never been afraid of the words "objective" and "universal" before. Objective as I knew it meant "based on facts". Universal as I knew it meant "applicable or common to all conditions or situations" It is a fact that up to two thousand people die from armed violence every day. And respect for human life is, or should be, a universal principle. So why am I afraid that these words could be abused to water down this treaty into humanitarian irrelevance? Suddenly, I am afraid of the word "consensus", which was a positive concept for me as it is a peaceful way to resolve conflicts. I fear that, in the name of consensus, States might accept otherwise unacceptable compromises. Please do not compromise the capability of the ATT to meet the humanitarian and human rights goals set for it. All conventional weapons must be included, from the largest to the smallest, and including munitions/ammunition, parts and components.

I am worried a few States would suggest that we drop the inclusion of small arms and light weapons, and their ammunition in the treaty. Irresponsible transfers of weaponry, munitions, armaments and related equipment across borders have resulted in the loss of millions of lives and livelihoods and the violation of fundamental human rights.

The widespread availability of small arms and light weapons increases the risk to both men and women's security, and impedes their enjoyment of their civil, political, social and economic rights in different ways. The arms trade has specific gender dimensions and direct links to discrimination and gender-based violence. Emboldened by weapons, power and status, both State and non-State parties often perpetrate gender-based violence with impunity. This has far-reaching implications for efforts to consolidate peace, security, gender equality and secure development.

I am worried that States will continue to tell us that no, they won't mention "gender" because it is a very sensitive matter. Is the protection of women from rape an issue that is sensitive or is it is a moral imperative? If the ATT is to be an effective legal instrument in regulating the international arms trade, recognition of the potential gendered impacts of international transfers must also be included. Accordingly, there should be strong references to gender in the treaty text and the criteria in the treaty should address risks of gender-based armed violence.

Delegates, I fear that there may be some of you who will not look kindly at the inclusion of human rights as a criterion when to transfer. I fear for those very many civilians who will continue to suffer from atrocities if the trade in weapons is not effectively regulated. I am a member of Pax Christi, and members of this faith-based organization from South Sudan to El Salvador, Haiti to Iraq, Mexico to the

Philippines, the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the United States of America, have seen how conventional weapons have been used to commit human rights violations. Whether these weapons circulate during or in the wake of war and violent conflict; they are collected and used by violent gangs and organized crime; or their proliferation is driven primarily by lucrative profits, the cost in human life and misery is unconscionable. The specific impact on women and children is especially egregious, as is the diversion of resources needed to protect human life and human rights and the natural world.

I am afraid that some of you may suggest that this is just a trade treaty. Yes, I am afraid for the people who will not get access to clean water and basic health services or who can't go to school because funds are diverted to weapons purchases. A religious leader once said that weapons kill whether they are used or not.

I worry that you will say that reporting will be onerous. But a comprehensive ATT would provide a framework within which assistance could be given to States that require it. An ATT must create an Implementation Support Unit (ISU) that could assist States in such tasks or create structures that would make it less burdensome for States to fulfill their obligations that will be set forth by the proposed treaty. A provision on international cooperation and assistance is another way by which this concern could be addressed. States that have the capability, technical or financial, could assist States that require such assistance.

Dear Delegates, despite these fears, I come here with faith. I have faith that in deciding on this treaty, you will consider its humanitarian imperative. I, like the campaigners who are here have faith that you will adopt an ATT that will significantly reduce the humanitarian harm that flows from illegal, under-regulated or irresponsible transfers of conventional arms.

And when this comes to be, an ATT that will save lives and reduce human suffering, I shall fear no more. Thank you very much.