

**Opening Address by Ms. Bianca Pabotoy on behalf of Control Arms
9th Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty
Monday 21 August 2023**

Madam. President, Distinguished Delegates,

I am honored to be here today speaking on behalf of the Control Arms Coalition. I wish to take this opportunity to express my own personal appreciation and that of Control Arms to the Republic of Korea for their leadership and efforts in guiding the work throughout this year under the Arms Trade Treaty.

Control Arms welcomes the Republic of Korea's efforts to universalise the ATT in the Asia-Pacific region, a region that according to SIPRI was the largest recipient of conventional arms from 2018 to 2022. In our region, the Asia-Pacific region, states are investing in conventional weapons as an insurance policy in an uncertain security environment.

While current headlines focus on the conflicts in Africa, Europe, and the Middle East, armed conflicts and gun violence in Asia also demand the ATT community's attention. The successful implementation of the ATT in Asia, requires that the ATT community have a comprehensive grasp of the complexities and challenges associated with armed conflict and gun violence which prevail in this region.

In the Southeast Asian region, the human cost of the armed conflicts in the southern provinces of Thailand have totaled to about 7,300 deaths since 2004.¹ Since the February coup in Myanmar, there has been a recorded 2,091 civilian casualties.² In Aceh, Indonesia an estimated 30,000 people were killed during the almost 30 years of conflict.³

In the Philippines, where I am from, the first ASEAN country to take the significant step of joining the ATT, the illicit trade and proliferation of loose firearms and weapons continues to be a key issue to peace and security. Filipinos own an estimated 3.9 million firearms with some 2.1 million in illegal possession.⁴ Small arms proliferation has allowed the formation of private armed groups (PAG) enabling political dynasties, and sustained the two major armed conflicts in the country.

Multiple drivers of armed violence remain embedded in the daily lives of Filipinos, enabling a false sense of security through armament. The easy access and strong presence of the illicit production and proliferation of small arms and light weapons drives familial feuds or 'Rido,' transforming land disputes into violent confrontations. The ready access to and circulation of

¹ <https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/Thailand-s-deep-south-conflict-is-approaching-a-critical-point>

² <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-potentially-war-crime-inducing-advanced-blast-attack-results-over-160-fatalities>

³ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0738894221994503#bibr64-0738894221994503>

⁴ International Alert. (2017). Where do illegal guns in the Philippines come from? Retrieved from <https://www.international-alert.org/news/where-do-illegal-guns-philippines-come>

arms and resources to create improvised weapons enable groups to engage in long-term violence.

Arms are claimed as a form of security. For areas with fragile security, arms, especially small arms and light weapons, serve as a means for personal protection, leading to a parallel and violent justice system devoid of due process. It is also attached to class and power status, giving individuals a tool for the violent resolution of conflict.

When the ATT is implemented rigorously, especially those obligations related to prohibitions under Article 6, risk assessments under Article 7, and diversion under Article 11, the Treaty can play a key role in maintaining and strengthening peace and security and contribute to arresting some of the worst cases of armed violence.

In doing so, States Parties must:

1. **Address the humanitarian imperative of the ATT:** We cannot deny the human cost of arms transfers on the enjoyment of peace and security. We cannot skirt around the reality that arms transfers facilitate and exacerbate armed conflict. Armed conflict often ends in the permanent displacement of communities, as seen in our own experience in the Philippines. Armed conflict impedes young people's access to education and better economic opportunities, resulting in the recruitment of extremist groups. Armed conflict enables gender-based violence from intimidation to threats to deaths. These lived realities should be central to all conversations within the CSP cycle. ATT States Parties and signatories can review and amend national policies and regulations on its arms trade, and explicitly include gender and human rights considerations. This may involve integrating language that emphasizes the prevention of gender-based violence and human rights violations.
2. **Uphold transparency:** Transparency is a central objective of the ATT. As such, states must champion transparency throughout the ATT process, including in reporting arms transfers and exploring national control systems, including information on risk assessment processes Confidentiality in arms transfer reporting and national control systems is a tool often used to balance the competing interests of national security and transparency. While confidentiality can appear to provide safety and security and encourage the submission of information, it can be a barrier to inclusivity, confidence building and, ultimately, transparency. It is only through transparency that we can be assured that States Parties are living up to their obligations.
3. **Information Exchange:** The success of this Treaty relies upon open and frank conversations between States Parties and stakeholders within the cycle of Conference of States Parties. This includes discussions and information sharing initiatives on effective Treaty implementation, the road to Treaty universalization, furthering transparency and reporting, and on arms transfers themselves. As we have recently heard, engagement by States Parties within the ATT Working Groups and CSP is

diminishing, all at a time when the global community appears to need the ATT most. Only if States Parties are willing to enthusiastically engage on these topics will the momentum of this Treaty persist.

4. **Enable Accountability within the arms trade through the ATT Working Groups and Conferences of States Parties:** There can be no arms trade without the arms industry. Therefore, we call on the arms industry to support ATT compliance at all points throughout the transfer chain. We further call on industry to support and protect human rights by implementing the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and championing the cause of the ATT.

Nine years following the ATT's entry into force, discussions cannot remain focused on how the ATT should work. We need to discuss how the ATT currently works. This week is the opportunity to discuss the actual human impact brought about by the export and import of arms – an impact that does not end in the physical life cycle of a weapon, but leaves scars of trauma and builds a culture of fear and violence. I urge all participants to make the most of this opportunity and ensure the ATT fulfills its role in preventing the human suffering caused by irresponsible arms transfers.