

Statement by Thomas M. Countryman, Assistant Secretary of State
United States of America
The First Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty
August 24, 2015
Cancun, Mexico

I thank the Government of Mexico for its commitment to the Arms Trade Treaty, its kind offer to host the First Conference of States Parties, and its warm hospitality here in Cancun. And I welcome the enthusiasm shown by States Party in bringing this Treaty into force in such a short time.

We are here to take foundational decisions to operationalize this Treaty, to turn it from mere words on the page into a reality that makes a difference around the world. We are here to breathe life into this Treaty by standing up its international operation.

To be successful, we must keep in mind certain fundamental principles. First, we must remind ourselves of the shared commitment that we all have to the text that we all have signed. That text enjoys overwhelming international support, and we need to remain faithful to its provisions, which were the result of difficult choices made during a multi-year negotiation.

Second, The Treaty contains obligations for States Parties, not for other entities. The decisions made here must reflect this fact. Civil society and industry played important roles during the negotiation, but neither one can join the Treaty. Only States Parties can. However, the Treaty must operate in an open, transparent, and inclusive manner that allows civil society and industry, without discrimination, to continue to play an important role as observers assisting States Parties.

Third, we acknowledge and admire the hard work many States have done to prepare for this conference, but it is even more important for States to devote still greater energy to their national decisions that will implement their NATIONAL obligations under this INTERNATIONAL Treaty. The location of the Secretariat is NOT as important as decisions made by national governments to pass legislation and create procedures for import and export, to fight corruption in government, police and the military, and to build bilateral cooperation against arms traffickers. The ATT Secretariat can and should be a support mechanism for States making those hard choices. The Secretariat can NOT implement the Treaty; it cannot serve as a supranational decision mechanism; nor can it be a substitute for hard decisions in capitals. The United States, which has long implemented laws and practices that are fully consistent with ATT requirements, will continue to offer assistance to States determined to establish the laws, the processes, the control lists and the border controls that will allow them to implement fully this Treaty.

Finally, the Treaty is not a solution by itself to the problems of armed conflict that plague the world, but it is a tool that we can use, energetically and effectively, to address those problems. The United States will continue its commitment to the Arms Trade Treaty. Like so many of you, we worked hard for years

to achieve a Treaty that is both workable and meaningful. Decisions taken in this room, but especially the decisions taken at home by the governments represented in this room, will determine whether the ATT will live up to its potential.