

Mr. Francis Mutuku's Speech

I am very pleased to be here today, talking about the impact of weapons in my country Kenya and the need for urgent action to reduce the flow of weapons into Kenya.

My name is Mutuku Nguli and I am The CEO of PeaceNet, a Civil Society Network for Peacebuilding and Conflict Management. PeaceNet works with communities in the entire Republic and we have 128 member organisations all over Kenya. Our main programmatic areas include: Membership Development and Networking, Policy Advocacy and Information, Training and Capacity Building for Peace, Research and Documentation and Human Security and Development.

It is the northern areas of Kenya which have traditionally been prone to violence. The area experiences very harsh climatic conditions with minimal or no rains at all and this is where the Kenyan nomadic pastoral communities reside. Whilst there has always been some levels of conflict between neighbouring ethnic groups – over land, water and livestock – the weapons have changed from bows, spears and arrows to automatic weapons, intensifying the violence and increasing the lethality and ferocity of the violence. Traditionally, livestock raids were an old tradition which was practised within some normative principles – for example, sparing the women and children and also as a sign of graduating the community young men into adulthood. The advent of automatic weapons and the power this gives to the youth, has in some cases led to a breakdown of the traditional authority of the elders who used to contain, manage and even limit the violence.

The violence devastates lives, tears apart families, destroys livelihoods, leaving people desperate and penniless. Families have lost breadwinners, people have been maimed.

Here are some recent examples:

a) At a remote village called Tot, on the border of Baringo and Marakwet districts, an emaciated widow walking on crutches came to the podium and narrated her story to a big crowd that included the local member of Parliament.

"we were sleeping in one of the huts while our two sons slept at the one near the cattle yard" she started.

"in the early hours of the morning, there was some movement just behind our hut. My husband woke up and slowly crawled to the door. No sooner had he opened the door, guns blazed the air and all hell broke loose" she continued. "I dashed for cover while calling the name of my husband and then my two sons. While at it, some deep pain engulfed my body and I went into a coma. I was later to learn from my hospital bed that all my family members had been wiped out and all our livestock taken away by the enemy. Life has never been the same again, but now I see hope through a new Oxfam-PeaceNet project to restock cattle" She concluded

b) In 2007, a security van transporting cash to a bank in the Rift Valley was sprayed with bullets by occupants of an open pick up van that was driving ahead of the escort vehicle. All the police officers in the escort team both with the escort van and that of the transit cash car were killed by the road side. This prompted a short stand off between the escort police and the banks.

c) Mid this year, two policemen on routine patrol in Dandora, Nairobi were murdered in cold blood by criminals who resisted arrest. The murderers used guns and also escaped with the arms that belonged to the police officers.

d) Again, early in the year, a conflict that pitted two community clans in Kuria district, in Western Kenya turned violent after gangs armed themselves with sophisticated weapons and caused mayhem - deaths, injuries, rape of women, destruction of property and untold suffering of children. This was experienced in an area that had never been considered as armed

e) A resistance movement against irregular land allocations in Mt Elgon District, (at the border with Uganda) was set up by a group of young men calling themselves, the Sabaot Land Defense Force (SLDF). This was in 2005. The group quickly acquired sophisticated arms and security communication equipment and targeted police stations, and the general population causing mayhem and untold suffering of women, children and the elderly. It was only upon the intervention of the military that the group was finally contained in 2007

Where have these weapons come from?

The genesis of arms acquisition can be traced to the infamous "shifta war" of the 1970's. The Kenyan Somali community had risen to resist what they perceived as marginalisation by the Government and had attempted to secede. Since then, weapons have come from neighbouring countries as conflicts and weapons have spilled over the borders with Somalia, Southern Sudan, and Uganda. The arms situation seemed to get worse and pastoral communities in Kenya seemed to compete for arms in order to re-stock against any raids from the neighbouring communities.

Although Northern Kenya communities have been traditionally associated with armed violence due to the use of guns and other sophisticated arsenals, it has recently emerged that, post the recent electoral crisis, the country has seemingly been faced with an increased acquisition of arms by other communities that are not traditionally associated with arms. The current arms flow into other "none traditional" areas is depicting a pattern of growing acquisition or demand. This is much more pointed to parts of the Central Rift Valley and Central Kenya while Nairobi is slowly becoming a hub for illegal arms. PeaceNet has sketch maps to that effect which show routes and market centers for illegal guns.

The price of various categories of illegal guns has also considerably gone down, compared with similar costs mid 2008. A survey shows that guns are available in various parts as follows: in the Rift Valley – an AK 47 costs around \$230 down from over \$1000 last year. In Nairobi, a pistol goes for as little as \$20.

It is common knowledge that there is increased real or perceived fear among Kenyans after the post elections' crisis in 2007/8. This fear has been driving most communities to arm themselves just in case there is a repeat of the same in 2012.

National Impact

Although Kenya has cut a niche as a tourist destination in the region, the above situation is a negation of the tourist confidence in Kenya as a destination of choice. Millions of dollars are currently being spent to rejuvenate this industry by the Government but there is no amount of persuasion that is going to fully convince tourists to spend their dollars in Kenya unless the situation of armed violence is put under considerable check

It is also evident that the influx of illegal arms and the arming of communities is scarring away both existing and potential foreign investors. Although it might not be official, most international

agencies have continued to seek alternative locations for their offices in case there is a repeat of post elections' crisis in Kenya. The most preferred choice has been the establishment of offices in Arusha and other neighbouring capitals

There has also been increased fear among Kenyans regarding land ownership in areas that are not associated with their own communities. This therefore diminishes opportunities for both development and the national social integration philosophy.

What is being done?

Peacenet was at the forefront of the SMS text messaging during the post-election violence – providing information which could be used to contain the violence. The network established a "Nerve Centre" point where a total of 77 peace monitors were deployed just before and after elections to monitor the situation on the ground and send by the minute SMS text updates to the Nerve Centre. The general public were also linked to the same facility during the crisis and this provided a large amount of diverse information from all over the country.

This was an important initiative which became the convergence point for all Civil Society organisations in Nairobi on a daily basis at the height of the crisis. The initiative may be expanded to other parts of Africa and the world over in order to use ICT to inform early warning and early intervention framework by actors.

PeaceNet also works to support traditional peace committees and is looking at how to prevent a repeat of elections' violence for 2012 by enhancing the Local Capacities for peace and has been working closely with the Government of Kenya to put in place a national peace policy in order to strengthen the national peace architecture

But all this work will not succeed if there is a continuous flow of weapons into Kenya. As well as all the work that we are doing on the ground to reduce the demand for weapons and their use, the supply side must also be addressed. That is why we need an Arms Trade Treaty. As we have already heard today, there are an estimated 2,000 deaths out of gun or gun related incidents around the world. My organization sees this impact of armed violence day by day and urges governments here to move quickly to achieve a robust Arms Trade Treaty to start to reduce this terrible toll.

Thank you.