

**United Nations Conference to Review Progress
Made in the Implementation of the
Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in
Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects**

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"The Canadian Lesson"

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Mr. President, I am Tony Bernardo, Executive Director of the Canadian Institute for Legislative Action. I want to thank you and the Conference for making it possible for NGOs to speak today.

Five years ago in this very venue, at the 2001 Small Arms Conference, NGOs were also allowed to make presentations. I was privileged enough to be one of the presenters on that occasion. Mr. President, throughout this Conference's proceeding others have comments on what has and has not occurred, what has and has not changed.

Mr. President, a great deal has changed in Canada. With the possible exception of Brazil, I do not think any state represented here today has undergone a change in attitude or policy such as Canada has. Now it should be obvious that I speak as a representative of a Canadian NGO and not the government of Canada. Notwithstanding that fact, I am here today to make ensure that due attention is paid to what has occurred.

Mr. President, there have been two watershed events in Canada since the 2001 Conference, and they are directly related. First, Mr. President, Canada had the on-the-ground experience of attempting to institute an extensive but impractical gun registration system. Many are familiar with the details and I will not cite chapter and verse or inundate you with budgetary horror stories. I'll only say that what was supposed to cost millions of dollars cost billions of dollars - what was supposed to fight crime only made criminals out of law-abiding citizens and what was supposed to be a model for the world turned out to be a painful lesson of how not to do it.

The second watershed event was that the very firearms registration scheme I have just described went on to become a significant political issue in several federal elections. The government that produced the programme is, shall we say, no longer with us. Elections have consequences and policies change. The registration scheme itself is now in the process of being reformed by the current government.

Mr. President, there is an important lesson to be learned here. Regulatory schemes, whether they are national or international, are doomed to failure if their primary impact is upon the law-abiding; hunters, sport shooters and firearms owners. Mr. President, perhaps others will disagree with this assessment, but we believe the Canadian experience cannot be ignored. The UN must focus on illegal international trafficking and not be seduced into impractical new schemes.

Unfortunately, Mr. President, the draft report does contain one such scheme. An international effort on marking and tracing of ammunition is beyond the pale of what is either practical or realistic. Indeed, the implementation of importation marks applied to firearms has already been significantly delayed in Canada due to the horrendous costs and technical problems associated with it, costs that shall be born by legitimate industry and ultimately, Canadian sportspersons. Yet, the technical difficulties in applying markings to previously manufactured firearms are mere "child's play" compared to the impact that the marking and tracing of ammunition would have on legitimate industry.

On behalf of Canada's recreational firearms community, we implore the United Nations to consider these factors when striving for focus on these critical issues. With that comment, Mr. President, thank you for your indulgence and patience.