

ADDENDUM

In our recent report on the UN regional meeting on the Implementation of the Programme of Action, WiSH highlighted concerns at the content of the opening address delivered at the meeting.

We noted that the Hon. Duncan Kerr MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs, expressed the view that the Australian government's goal is "...prohibition of small arms and light weapons trafficking."

This statement did not appear to differentiate between the illicit trade in small arms, and the legal private ownership of, and trade in, firearms.

The term 'prohibition'- when cited as a goal - usually indicates an intended (or desired) shift in the status of a particular activity from licit to illicit. It is not commonly used to describe ambitions in regard to an activity that is already illicit.

The more honest elements among the anti-gun lobby have admitted that their goal, through creeping legislative change, is the total prohibition of legal firearms trade and ownership. However, it was troubling to hear a representative of the Australian government express what could be interpreted as the same goal.

Therefore, WiSH sought further clarification on Mr Kerr's statement.

We are pleased to have been advised by Mr Kerr's office that the term was not intended to refer to the legal trade in firearms, and that the statement was meant to refer only to the illegal trade. We thank Mr Kerr's office for providing clarification on this issue.

In the context of other material discussed at the regional meeting (see our full meeting report), this leaves unanswered questions about where the UN and the Australian government stand regarding what types of trade in, and ownership of, firearms they believe should be classified (or reclassified) as 'illicit', and under what circumstances the trade in, and ownership of, firearms is deemed 'legal' or 'illegal'.

We trust that any future statements by the Australian government about the illegal trade in firearms will contain clear assurances that no further restrictions will be placed upon legal owners and the legal trade.

This is an important matter for governments to acknowledge if they are to be seen as credible in their commitment to dealing with criminal activity, particularly given the vast amount of evidence demonstrating that restricting legal ownership of firearms through ever-increasing legislation does not impact on crime.