



**Statement by H.E. Bob Rae (Canada)**

**President of the Economic and Social Council**

Joint Meeting of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council on  
Small Arms and Light Weapons Control for Preventing Violence and Advancing  
Sustainable Development

17 March 2025

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates and dear friends,

We meet at an important time when we can see violence and conflict around the world creating an enormous challenge for women and children and men who are affected by this extraordinary outburst of conflict which we're seeing in so many parts of the globe.

The President and I have been talking about ways in which we can create a more dynamic discussion, including the General Assembly and ECOSOC. Later this week, we're going to be meeting with the President of the Security Council. I'm told this is the first time that the three Presidents have met, which strikes me as odd that we would not have met, but now we're meeting, and it's a great pleasure for me to be part of this discussion.

We all know that the 2030 Agenda has, in fact, called in item 16.4 calling for a significant reduction of illicit financial flows, as well as the illicit flows of arms. The whole issue of small arms and light weapons has in a sense, taken a bit of a back seat to the more dramatic disarmament discussions which have dominated the world of the United Nations since Nagasaki and Hiroshima in 1945. But we need to



understand the incredible damage that has been done and is being done every day by the weapons that are being manufactured, sold, exported across borders and that are contributing to this world of conflict which we're living in.

I think the President has pointed out very effectively the link between security and development. You don't need to be a graduate of a philosophical study to understand something very simple. We said, unless there is security, there will be no investment. And unless there is security and investment, there will be no development. It's that simple.

Conflict is the enemy of development, and those who profit from the export of weaponry are actually contributing to the poverty and hardship of the world. In the case of Haiti, for example, armed gangs have expanded operations and territory to the point now where it is estimated that close to 90% of the capital city of Port-au-Prince is under the control of organized gangs. Those gangs are being financed by somebody, and those gangs are wreaking havoc, taking lives and preventing Haiti from being able to develop. We also now that the weaponry which is now available for gangs and other agents of civil society is, in fact, becoming far more sophisticated. And indeed, we now know that we are entering into a period when robotic weapons driven by algorithms, in which no human hand needs to touch the trigger can kill thousands of people. This technology is not some science fiction movie. This is the technology that is available today, that is causing such potential risk to the people of the world.

So, we need to have, as the President has pointed out, we need to have a comprehensive and integrated approach by all of us. Obviously, Member States are at the heart of this discussion. Member States can stop the trafficking in arms. Member States can prevent the export of arms, and Member States can deal with the control of weapons in terms of how weapons are made available and how they are used. Some Member States choose to do this. Some Member States don't, and we need to become more aware of how widespread this problem is.



So, we have to look at both the supply and the demand, because we are in the business in the United Nations, saving lives, and remind ourselves every day, saving future generations from the scourge of war. And we're also in the business of allowing for health, education, housing, and above all, human development to be taking place in places that are secure and free from violence. So, this is what the 2030 Agenda is all about, and this is why we are here, devoted a push.

Nous devons trouver une approche qui reflète l'intégrité de ces problèmes, le fait que l'ensemble de ce problème, le fait que les exportations de ces armes constituent une menace directe pour les populations civiles, et je dois le dire en particulier pour les femmes et les enfants. Ce sont les victimes innocentes des causes, peut-être politiques, peut-être des gangs qui sont là pour profiter des difficultés d'autres. C'est pourquoi l'approche que nous adoptons doit respecter le genre, doit être inclusive et elle doit aussi être intersectionnelle, dans la mesure où elle doit représenter une compréhension des risques encourus par les populations les plus marginalisées qui existent dans le monde.

Last week, the Commission on the Status of Women adopted a powerful political declaration to mark the 30th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women to respect, protect and promote rights equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. These are the meetings that are going on all around this building and all around this city, starting last week and going and carrying on through this week. And so, in particular, in addition to the comments that have made by my friend the president, I wanted to focus on this question of our obligation to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls and look at the linkage between this question and the question of small arms and light weapons.

The statistics are alarming. 95% of the victims of conflict related sexual violence are women and girls. Think about that for a minute. When we read these statistics, we often think, well, it's not just women and girls, it's men, too. Well, no, the best



majority is women and girls, which is why we have to take affirmative action. 70 and 90% of such incidents involve guns. So here we have the link. The link is clear.

In some countries with high rates of what we call femicide, more than half of these killings are perpetrated with small arms. Small arms and light weapons-related instruments would be more comprehensive and sustainable with a deeper understanding of how rigid norms about gender, especially masculinities. What does it mean to be a man? Is it a test for manhood that you have a gun in your hand? Is it a test of masculinity that you can shoot women with impunity? We have to understand what drives weapon acquisition, what drives the illicit trade, what drives the armed violence, including sexual and gender-based violence.

So, part of what I hope we can begin to do in all of our approaches, and some of it sounds incredibly sort of obvious, but needless to we have to do it. We have to develop the data and the information. We have to have the data that is actually disaggregated so that we understand what's happening to men, what's happening to women, what's happening to children, and why is it happening in this way. We need to work hard to identify the connections between this agenda and the conventions such as the Women Peace and Security agenda. And this means, of course, that we have to encourage the active participation of women in the process of discussing peace and making peace happen. This has to be a central approach of this body as we discuss this question. When you have this number of women and children being killed, it's also fair to say nothing about them without them.

Nous devons écouter les voix des femmes. Nous devons donner les femmes la possibilité de participer activement à toutes ces discussions. Nous devons également écouter les jeunes, car ce sont eux qui sont impliqués dans les activités des gangs, et c'est pourquoi il est nécessaire de le faire. Nous devons également veiller à ce qu'elles participent à toutes nos discussions.



The integration of this question has to be an ongoing part of what we do. This year ECOSOC is discussing SDG 5 on gender equality. And let me say that as long as I'm the President of ECOSOC, we're not going to have any trouble pronouncing the words "gender equality". It has to be said.

And we also are looking at SDG 16, which has to do with peace, justice and strong institutions and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

As I said before, this is a national effort. No one here is trying to undermine the efforts and responsibilities of national governments. States have to step up and do this. The discussions that we have here are not intended to replace what states have to do. They're intended to encourage states to do it, and also to recognize that much of the flow of arms that takes place takes place between states. And we need to understand that where the borders are porous, that's where the law has to be, and that's where our response have to be.

As President of ECOSOC, I can tell you, we are very committed to assisting in this process of integration and in discussion which will allow for a fulsome reflection of these facts. This is really our opportunity to build on the momentum of the Summit of the Future and the Pact of the Future, which reaffirm that sustainable development, peace and security and human rights, the nexus we all talk about - it's a real thing, and we need to do everything we can to make sure that they are reinforcing.

Thank you very much.