

DRAFT STATEMENT: Up to 7 Minutes for delivery



KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY

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MINISTER OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
AND COOPERATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**AT THE
OPENING SESSION OF THE
TWELFTH CONFERENCE OF STATES PARTIES TO THE**

ARMS TRADE TREATY (ATT)

**CENTRE INTERNATIONAL DE CONFÉRENCES GENÈVE (CICG)
GENEVA,**

24 AUGUST 2026

Madam President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for the Republic of South Africa to serve as the Presidency of the Twelfth Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty.

In this regard, I wish to express our sincere appreciation to all States Parties for the confidence they have placed in South Africa.

Our Presidency coincides with our recent election on to the African Union's Peace and Security Council and our chair-ship of the Southern African Development Community.

Distinguished Delegates

Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan who passed away 8 years ago this week noted that ***"the death toll from small arms dwarfs that of all other weapons systems—in terms of the carnage they cause, small arms, indeed, could well be described as 'weapons of mass destruction'".***

This is indeed the case on the African Continent where the small arms used in armed conflict destabilise regions and severely hampers economic development.

We move from the position that A peaceful continent is possible. This aspiration inspired the Silencing the Guns in Africa agenda, which is a flagship initiative of the African Union's Agenda 2063 that aspires to end all wars, conflict and gender-based violence, and to prevent genocide.

It is against this background that for us the Arms Trade Treaty remains a cornerstone of the international framework governing the responsible trade in conventional arms.

At a time when armed conflict, instability, illicit arms trafficking and diversion of conventional arms continue to threaten international peace and security, the Treaty serves as an essential instrument for promoting transparency, accountability and responsibility in international arms transfers.

As we gather for CSP12, we are presented with an important opportunity to reflect on the future direction of the Treaty.

Accordingly, ensuring the effective implementation of the treaty requires the commitment, not only of States Parties, but also international organisations, civil society and affected communities, who play an important role in keeping States accountable.

The greatest challenge, however, is to ensure that States Parties continue to translate the provisions of the Treaty into effective national practice.

In the current geopolitical environment, where conflicts are increasingly interconnected and where the legitimate economic and security interests of States intersect with complex conflict dynamics, we must remain vigilant in ensuring that arms transfers are undertaken in accordance with the obligations and standards of the Treaty.

We should therefore continue to support and remind one another of our obligations and put in place appropriate measures to guard against transfers that could place States at risk of taking actions that are inconsistent with the Treaty.

To ensure effective arms control it remains imperative that the Treaty becomes universal. Consequently, as States Parties we have an obligation to work towards this endeavour.

The ATT is the first disarmament treaty that places the responsibility on us as States Parties to specifically make provisions for human rights considerations, including gender related considerations as part of the risk assessments prior to exporting arms.

As gender-based violence continues to affect communities across regions and in situations of armed conflict and instability, the effective implementation of this provision remains an important responsibility for all States Parties. We are pleased that Voluntary Gender Focal Points have been mandated to promote the Treaty's implementation.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

For the African Continent, the effective regulation of conventional arms remains closely linked to our broader peace, security and development objectives. The Treaty has an important role to play in supporting continental initiatives such as the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the Silencing the Guns initiative.

By strengthening responsible arms transfer controls and reducing illicit flows, the ATT contributes directly to efforts aimed at preventing conflict and consolidating peace.

The safe, secure and responsible management of ammunition is an essential component of preventing diversion and combating illicit trafficking. This is equally important for the implementation of the Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management which South Africa will preside over its First Meeting of States in July 2027.

This presents a unique opportunity to strengthen coherence, coordination and complementarity between the ATT and the new global ammunition framework.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

South Africa believes that women and youth play an essential role in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, mediation and decision-making.

We remain committed to advancing Women's meaningful and effective participation in these processes in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

Also important, the innovation, energy and perspectives of Youth can help strengthen our collective efforts to address contemporary security challenges. Accordingly, women and youth's perspectives and leadership are indispensable to the effective implementation of the Treaty.

Madam President, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

The strength and relevance of the Arms Trade Treaty depends on our collective commitment to its objectives and our willingness to work together in pursuit of common solutions. South Africa, born of a struggle against instruments of oppression. We know the price of inaction.

We know the taste of freedom won at terrible cost. We remain committed to working closely with all delegations to facilitate open dialogue and constructive engagement throughout this Conference.

In closing, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to all delegations, the ATT Secretariat, the Chairs and Co-Chairs of the Treaty's subsidiary bodies, regional organisations, civil society representatives, industry stakeholders and all partners who continue to contribute to the success of the Arms Trade Treaty.

I encourage all participants to engage in our deliberations in a spirit of cooperation, mutual respect and compromise, guided by our shared commitment to peace, security and responsible arms transfers. The guns will not silence themselves.

I am confident that, through our collective efforts, this Conference will deliver meaningful outcomes that strengthen the Treaty, advance its implementation and universalisation, support the effective regulation of conventional arms and ammunition, and contribute to regional and international peace and security.

Let this conference of State Parties be the place where we stop managing chaos and start constructing order. It is in our hands. We can construct order by implementing our obligations to this treaty.

I wish all delegations fruitful deliberations and a successful Twelfth Conference of States Parties.

I thank you.