

PC.DEL/519/11
2 June 2011

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of Belarus

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALYAKSANDR SYCHOV,
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TO THE OSCE, AT THE MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

2 June 2011

Regarding human security and the proper control of firearms

Mr. Chairperson,

The OSCE has always paid considerable attention to the problem of small arms and light weapons (SALW), especially since the adoption of the OSCE Document on SALW in the year 2000.

Traditionally, this question has been examined within our Organization primarily from the point of view of armed conflicts, and the OSCE's principal efforts in this area have been aimed at combating illicit trafficking in SALW in all its aspects, including manufacturing, marking, record keeping, export controls, management of stockpiles, reduction of surpluses and destruction.

At the same time, the excessive and destabilizing accumulation and uncontrolled proliferation of small arms also has a direct bearing on the everyday life and safety of the citizens of our countries. I am thinking here in the first instance of manifestations of violence connected with criminal activities and the tragic instances of mass murder in which firearms are involved, including those at schools and institutions of higher education.

Unfortunately, we have all recently witnessed on several occasions these kinds of terrible human tragedies, caused by firearms that in some cases have been acquired by entirely legal means.

In this connection, we believe it justified to examine ease of access to the possession of firearms and the absence of proper control over their use and storage by private individuals as one of the most serious threats to the security of our societies and citizens and as a direct violation of a fundamental human right, namely the right to life.

In this context, we cannot but be alarmed at the fairly critical situation that has developed in this respect in the United States.

As we are all aware, the second amendment to the United States Constitution adopted as long ago as 1791 guarantees American citizens the right to possess firearms.

As a result, the United States is currently the world leader in terms of the number of firearms in private ownership. Specifically, American citizens own more than 200 million weapons, a figure which exceeds the size of the country's adult population. Each year the number of weapons in private hands increases by 4.5 million.

Furthermore, there is clearly insufficient control over these weapons, at the legislative level and through other laws.

In the United States there are a number of federal laws regulating the procedure for the possession and use of firearms. However, the majority of the rules of this kind are established by individual states.

For example, in 46 states there are no restrictions on the number of weapons a person may purchase at a given time. In only four states are there rules stipulating that a person may purchase only one weapon per month. In 43 states no licence or registration is required to purchase a weapon. In 44 states there are no regulations governing the second-hand gun market (this means that a person may freely sell his pistol to anyone wishing to buy it). In 23 states potential customers are only checked against the federal criminal database. In seven states there is no age limit for the purchase of weapons from private vendors. There is no minimum age for the possession of firearms in 18 states (this means that, according to the letter of the law, a babe in arms may own a pistol). A further 13 states allow 13- to 16-year-olds to own a weapon. Only in four states are there legislative instruments stipulating that personal weapons must be stored in a specially equipped, secure place, for example in a safe.

Also, according to recent figures, the United States currently ranks number one in the world for the number of crimes committed with the use of firearms. Each year around 12,000 people are killed in the country by guns.

We believe that it is time for the American authorities to give serious thought to whether the second amendment is relevant today and whether its present implementation is in line with the original goal, namely that of ensuring the security of the State through the existence of a "well regulated militia".

Unquestionably, this problem not only concerns the United States. It is a general challenge for all participating States.

We have raised the subject of the control of firearms under the agenda item "review of current issues" without tying it in with any specific consideration or incident so as to draw attention to it and possibly to avoid the need in the future to return to it under sadder circumstances.

We firmly believe that within the OSCE – through interaction between the Permanent Council and the OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation – specific and decisive steps could be taken with regard to this problem, and relevant OSCE norms, principles and measures could be drawn up. What this needs is merely the political will of the participating States and a desire to resolve real problems of security, which every human being can understand. This

kind of approach would be fully in keeping with the OSCE's concept of comprehensive security, one of the key components of which is human security and at the centre of which is the human being.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.