



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**MESSAGE TO CONFERENCE ON WEAPONS
AND INTERNATIONAL RULE OF LAW
San Remo, Italy, 8 September 2016**

*Delivered by Under-Secretary-General Miguel de Serpa Soares,
United Nations Legal Counsel*

It is a pleasure to greet this distinguished gathering.

In recent years, we have all become increasingly alarmed by dramatically rising levels of humanitarian need and declining political will to meet them. Parties to conflict brazenly violate long-established rules of war and international humanitarian law. The toll on civilians continues to be unacceptable.

The international community has made great strides in its efforts to eliminate weapons that inflict indiscriminate harm on civilians. The Cluster Munitions Convention and Mine Ban Treaty were groundbreaking achievements. The Arms Trade Treaty is a further historic global commitment to bring the rule of law to the global sales and transfers of arms. I call on all Member States that have not done so to sign and ratify the Treaty; this is crucial for achieving its full potential. Indeed, I continue to urge all Member States to do their utmost to arrive at universal membership in all disarmament treaties. This would be a boon for the international rule of law.

As we strive towards our long-term goals, a number of situations and challenges demand immediate action.

It is my hope that the recently released findings of the UN-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism on the use of chemical weapons in Syria will serve as a step toward ensuring accountability. We have a collective responsibility to prevent the norm against chemical weapons from weakening further.

I also continue to call on all parties to armed conflict to refrain using explosive weapons in populated areas. I am encouraged that you have made this issue a focus of your round-table. I support the efforts of States to collect data on the harm to civilians, to share best practices in minimizing these impacts, and to enhance the protection of civilians.

Our efforts to control arms must keep up with advances in technology. We need to build and consolidate the international norms that apply in outer space and in cyber space. I also support the development of new measures to ensure transparency, accountability and restraint over the use and transfer of armed unmanned aerial vehicles, and to address concerns posed by lethal autonomous weapon systems.

The need to uphold international humanitarian law was high on the agenda of the World Humanitarian Summit this past May, as part of the “Agenda for Humanity”. Even war has rules, and I continue to urge renewed commitment to these core principles.

Thank you for your commitment to this critical work of consequence for all humankind. Please accept my best wishes for a successful round-table.