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United Nations General Assembly 1st Committee Topic Area B

*Assistance to states for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and light
weapons and collecting them.*



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1. Introduction

During the last decades, due to the increasing illicit traffic of small arms and light weapons the United Nations' first committee is under a perpetual effort in order to come up with a solution to this problem. A first step taken towards this effort is the article 26 of the United Nations Charter which calls for "the establishment and maintenance of international peace and security with the least diversion for armaments of the world's human and economic resources." Nevertheless, phenomena like civil wars, terrorism and poverty in many developing countries all over the world, enforce the illicit traffic and make the committee's work harder.

During the period under review (July 2004 to July 2006), the Group of Interested States in Practical Disarmament Measures considered and provided financial support to a number of project proposals submitted by the Department for Disarmament Affairs, its Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and non-governmental organizations. The proposals included a fact-finding mission undertaken jointly by the Department for Disarmament Affairs and the Bureau to Burundi in February 2005, undertaken in response to a request of the Government of Burundi for assistance in addressing the problem of civilian possession of small arms and light weapons; and the Regional Symposium on the Implementation by Arab States of the Program of Action, held in Algiers from 11 to 13 April 2005. Following the presentation by the Nairobi-based Africa Peace Forum to the Group of Interested States of a project entitled "Implementation of small arms and light weapons control measures in South Sudan", the Government of Germany decided to provide funding for the project, which is currently being implemented by the Bonn International Centre for Conversion.

2. The need for Disarmament

It is of vital importance to understand the magnitude of curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons and observe that the economic, political and social profits are much higher than those from the maintenance of the illicit traffic. Moreover, it is useful to recollect the following



records about the armed conflicts during the 20th century, the arms expenditures and the arms production.

2.a. 20th Century Armed Conflicts

In contrast to the wars of the 19th century, which had limited damages to the immediate vicinity of conflict, armed conflicts in the 20th century have been struggles encompassing entire societies. Weapons with ever more indiscriminate destructive power came into use — long range artillery, bombers, intercontinental ballistic missiles, chemical, bacteriological and nuclear weapons — embattling entire countries and regions. During the Second World War, the unarmed merchant shipping turned out to be a game for submarines, while terror bombing of populous cities was a routine, culminating in the use of the nuclear weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The end of the Cold War removed a primary source of the world's feeling of insecurity, but also left a legacy of massive military expenditures and arsenals of deadly weapons entirely disproportionate to any rational assessment of threats to security. In fact, a major threat to international security now steams from the existence of those arsenals, and military doctrines that continue to give emphasis on weapons of mass destruction. This is mainly happening because the political/economic power structures of the Cold War persist and continue to benefit from military expenditures. Apart from the Cold War legacy, there are many other sources of international tension. Some of the most important ones are major economic, social and political inequalities among the world's nations. The emergence of new centers of political and economic power, the incessant competition for resources, the continuing trade imbalances, the volatile financial flows, the rapid demographic changes and the environmental degradation; all pose unprecedented challenges to security.

Over the last five decades it has become lucid to governments - partially due to a sequence of major UN conferences - that these security challenges cannot be dealt with, in traditional ways. In fact, the only way to address them effectively is by making human security - the welfare of individuals and families - a prime concern of the suggested policy. Economic and social development, fundamental human rights, environmental protection and good governance are now



the essential underpinning for the security of states. Disarmament today is important not only in order to reduce the risk of war and dismantle the dangerous legacy of the Cold War, but also to prevent the continuous waste of human and material resources, which are necessary for much more productive and beneficial ends.

2.b Arms Expenditures

Decline in global military expenditures and arms production since the end of the Cold War seems to have bottomed out, and expenditures may be headed back up. Arms production has been levelled since 1995. In details: Arms expenditures have been reduced approximately by 30% during the last decade, reflecting reductions in every region except Asia (where the trend has gone the other way, up 27 per cent, since 1989). The number of military personnel has been reduced by 6 million persons and there have been reductions in both production and stockpiles of weapons. The United States, which account for about a third of the world's total production, have dropped their spending by one third. However, a 6-year defense plan presented in 1999 confirmed a return to augmentation. The Russian Federation's expenditures on arms have fallen precipitously: in 1998 they amounted to one-fifth of that of the Soviet Union ten years earlier. The fall is even more dramatic if the combined military expenditure is taking into consideration all the states that formulated the Soviet Union. In 1998, it was only 6% of their 1989 expenditure. West European military expenditure has fallen by 14% over the last decade, but has leveled off since 1995. European NATO member states have significantly increased their combined equipment expenditures in 1998 after a continuous decline since 1987. Available data for Latin America - the least transparent region - showed a ten-year fall, interrupted by a major increase in 1997. African military expenditures, comprising only the 1.2% of the global totality in 1998, have fallen over the decade because of the deteriorating economic conditions and disarmament in post apartheid South Africa.



2.c Arms Production

Arms production declined in the post Cold War period, as illustrated in a survey conducted in 100 countries by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). Figures available to SIPRI showed that the reduction in the volume of the arms production, which leveled off in 1995, was accompanied by a “profound restructuring of the industry.” A series of mergers and acquisitions in recent years has created companies with annual arms sales that are more than the entire defense budgets of most countries. “The largest arms-producing company, Lockheed Martin, had in 1997 arms sales of \$18.5 billion (total sales of \$28 billion), exceeding the 1997 national defense budgets of all but ten countries in the world.” As arms manufacturers augment - narrowing decision-making power — production is being internationalized, raising questions of political control over the production of armaments. The redistribution has reinforced the hierarchical structure of arms production, concentrated in a small number of countries, SIPRI says. Ten countries accounted for almost 90 percent of the estimated world arms production in 1996. The United States produced almost half of the total amount. Along with Britain and France, the next largest arms producing countries, the share rose to two-thirds of the total. World arms sales totaled \$55.8 billion in 1998, according to the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), whereas half of those sales were made by the United States. Russian arms sales were \$2.8 billion in 1998 and \$3.5 billion in 1999. According to William Hartung of the New York-based World Policy Institute, US taxpayers, not the recipients, financed more than half the \$12 billion in new agreements signed in 1996 for arms sales (the most recent year with available figures).

2.d Small Arms and Light Weapons

*The term “small arms” refers
to the weapons an individual can carry.
Light weapons are those operated
by two or three people. The weapons
in question range from revolvers*



*to grenade launchers, mortars
and light missiles.*

There are at least half a billion rifles, pistols, and other small arms in circulation around the world right now, and increasingly, these small arms are playing a larger role in conflicts and violence that engulfs various countries and regions.

These guns have a huge impact. While small arms continue to kill 300,000 people a year in conflicts, and 200,000 in criminal activities, millions more are injured, terrorized, or forced to leave their homes and become refugees or internally displaced persons. The majority of the victims are women and children.

Obviously, guns turn out to be dangerous in the possession of people: disaffected or unemployed youths, ethnic clan warriors, political party thugs, enraged civilians, take up weapons by conviction or greed, or both, and set off a chain of events which ultimately lead to losses, at any level. The end of the Cold War led to a decline of control over these weapons in many parts of the world, while an upsurge in the frequency and intensity of intrastate wars and conflicts created a staggering demand for them.

There has been increasing international awareness over the last two decades on the need to prevent and reduce destabilizing accumulations and flows of small arms and light weapons, particularly through illicit and irresponsible trafficking. A number of initiatives have been undertaken at global, regional and national level.

Since January 1999, practical work on this issue has been undertaken by the Euro- Atlantic Partnership Council, within an Ad Hoc group created for this purpose. The UN GA convened an International Conference on the illicit arms trade, in July 2001.

The numerous armed conflicts since the end of the Cold War have been fought almost exclusively with small arms and light weapons. In these wars, eight out of ten non-combatant



civilians killed, were women or children¹. Activism by governments and civil society has increased since 1995 due to the rising of awareness of the growing carnage. A UN Panel of Governmental experts on small arms outlined the magnitude of the problem in a 1997 report, and a number of other studies since then have contributed to the understanding of the situation. A major contributory factor to the present small arms situation is that arms brokers, who worked as agents of governments during the Cold War, are now in the business for profit. As governments dumped excess stocks in the post Cold War period, they became middlemen, trafficking the weapons into areas of conflict selling indiscriminately to drug dealers, terrorists and insurgent armies. There are not many international or even national regulations to control this, and monitoring is skimpy. In the meanwhile, the world's stock of over 500 million small arms and light weapons is growing steadily as a number of 70 countries continue with industrial scale production.

2.e Assistance to Countries in Need

During the last decades the U.N. System in co-operation with governments, civil societies and international NGO's assists with programs aimed at addressing the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, all of its partner countries in need, while empowers them to promote security.

Building on its traditional activities in relevant areas, and working in direct partnership the U.N. has successfully developed programs that have collected and destroyed thousands of arms, demobilized and reintegrated tens of thousands of ex-combatants, and strengthened the capacities of local communities and police to reduce levels of armed violence. By creating an "enabling environment", these programs have provided governments and communities with the knowledge and means to take control of the circumstances that affect them, and pursue a violence-free road to development.

It is suggested that the delegates would be able to search and discuss upon three main topics relative to assistance to states for curbing the illicit traffic: the implementation of the Programme of

¹ Where guns, and gunmen -or women, or children- dominate, development suffers. Schools and shops close, commerce stops, everyday activities and the local economy grind to a halt. There is no security. People cannot return to their homes or a normal life.



Action (Action Plan); the actions and arms embargoes mandated by the Security Council; the conflict prevention, disarmament, peace-building, and confidence-building measures.

Beyond the above, an assessment of what has been achieved until today by the action programme should be of major importance. Moreover, a discussion on what is in need to be supported and preserved or revised and restructured could be proved functional. This procedure involves issues like: further technical assistance for draft national reports on the implementation of the Program of Action; registration of firearms; the analysis of legal frameworks for firearms, ammunition and explosives; the elaboration of regulatory laws in the areas of firearms and ammunition stockpile management; the capacity-building for law enforcement officials in the marking and tracing of firearms, ammunition and explosives; and the creation of databases on firearms.

Furthermore, deliberation of further actions in order to enhance international cooperation in preventing, combating and eradicating illicit brokering in small arms and light weapons is expected. Moreover, a thorough evaluation of all the aspects of illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons such as, namely civilian possession of weapons, the question of ammunition, and the transfer of weapons to non-State actors, would be useful.

Last but not least, it is very important to define the problems, their extent and their aspects and then decide the structure and the magnitude of the assistance that is to be provided.

3. Final Remarks

3.a View to the World Awareness

On June 15th 2006, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on small arms and light weapons with a view to contributing to the Review Conference. In its resolution, the European Parliament, inter-alia, called upon States to agree to a set of global principles on arms transfers, including a requirement not to transfer weapons that are likely to contribute to human rights violations or crimes against humanity or that foster regional or national instability and armed



conflict. In the resolution, the international community was urged to start negotiations on an international arms trade treaty, within the United Nations and directly after the Review Conference.

It is crucial whether the above recommendation is possible to lead to a beneficial action plan, and of course, whether the international community is ready for such a dialogue, which would be undoubtedly fruitful.

3.b Expectations

The objectives of the round table, taking place during the sessions of the 1st committee, are to deepen and strengthen partnerships among the participants; to facilitate cooperation and coordination in combating illicit small arms and light weapons; and to share experiences and lessons learned in the implementation of the Programme of Action.

In addition, the Board's expectations about the debate exceed the typical discussion on issues concerning the curbing of the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons that would just verify the existence of problems and the great difficulty of reaching their solutions. Delegates should not just express general wishes and expressions of hope about a better future for the planet. They should be innovative, realistic and mainly propose precise solutions to the existing problems or reforms of already existing strategies.

3.c Disarmament Record: A Basic Guide²

- **1945 United Nations Charter** signed at San Francisco on 26 June (came into force on 24 October). World's first **nuclear explosion**, at Alamogordo, New Mexico, on 16 July, followed by bombing of **Hiroshima** and **Nagasaki** on 6 and 9 August respectively. **World War II** ended formally on 2 September.

² Data provide by a Study on Disarmament, "Disarmament a Basic Guide", Blaskar Menon, United Nations, New York 2001



- **1949** First nuclear test by the **Soviet Union** at Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan. The **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** established by 12 States with the aim of mutual defense.
- **1952** First nuclear test by the **United Kingdom** at Monte Bello, near Australia.
- **1956:** The Statute of the **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)** opened for signature. It came into force in 1957. The IAEA aimed to facilitate peaceful uses of nuclear energy and guard against military use.
- **1959:** The **Antarctic Treaty** demilitarized an entire region and created the first nuclear-weapon-free zone. It forbids all military activity, the testing of any kind of weapon and disposal of nuclear waste.
- **1960** First nuclear test by **France**, near Reggane, in the Sahara Desert.
- **1963:** The **Partial Test Ban Treaty** banned nuclear weapon testing in the atmosphere, outer space and under water.
- **1964** First nuclear test by **China** at Lop Nor, Xinjiang.
- **1967:** The **Outer Space Treaty** prohibited military maneuvers and the placing of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction in earth orbit and on celestial bodies, including the moon. This was supplemented by a 1979 agreement to prevent the use of the moon and other celestial bodies for military purposes.
- **Treaty of Tlatelolco** establishing the Latin America and the Caribbean Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone opened for signature: the first inhabited region of the planet to seek that status.
- **1968:** The nuclear **Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)** balanced a commitment by States without nuclear weapons not to develop or possess them, with one by nuclear-weapon States to negotiate their total elimination. The NPT entered into force in 1970 and has been the subject of periodic 5-year review conferences. *See also 1992, 1995 and 2000.* Security Council resolution 255 set out **security assurances** for non-nuclear weapon States.



- **1970:** The **International Atomic Energy Agency** established the safeguard system for NPT member States.
- **1971:** The **Sea Bed Treaty** prohibited the placement of nuclear weapons on or under the ocean floor beyond a 12-mile limit from the coast line.
- **1972:** A Convention banning **Biological and Toxin weapons**. It entered into force in 1975, the first major disarmament agreement in history committing States Parties (now including all the major military Powers) not only to stop developing biological weapons but to destroy all stocks in their possession. The BWC does not have verification arrangements and a protocol providing for that is currently under negotiation.

The **Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty** restricted the development of defensive missile systems by the United States and the Soviet Union (later Russian Federation), in order to ensure that neither side could have a shield that would allow it to launch a nuclear strike and survive. The treaty banned ABM systems based at sea, in the air, in space and on mobile launchers. Initially, it allowed the deployment of land based ABM system at two sites with no more than 100 launchers each, but under a 1974 Protocol, that was reduced to a single site. *See also 2000.* A **Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT)** set limits on the number of launchers of strategic weapons.

- **1973:** Agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union on the **Prevention of Nuclear War** aimed at aligning efforts to guarantee stability and peace.
- **1974** First nuclear test by **India**, at Pokharan, in the Rajasthan Desert. A **threshold yield** of 150 kilotons was agreed between the United States and the Soviet Union for underground nuclear weapon tests.
- **1975:** Final Act of the **Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe** initiated confidence-building measures that led to agreement in 1986 on concrete and verifiable measures that were further elaborated in 1990.
- **1976:** Limits were set by the United States and the Soviet Union for underground **peaceful nuclear explosions**: 150 kilotons yield for a single test, and 1,500 kilotons for grouped tests.



- **1977:** Agreement on preventing the use of **environmental modification techniques** to cause such phenomena as earthquakes, tidal waves, and changes in climate and weather patterns. Fifteen countries constituting the “**London Club**” of nuclear suppliers agreed on principles and guidelines for the transfer of nuclear materials, equipment and technology.
- **1978:** The UN General Assembly’s **first special session on disarmament** adopted a consensus Final Document. It gave the highest priority to nuclear disarmament.
- **1979:** Agreement by the United States and the Soviet Union to limit the number and types of **nuclear strategic missiles** (SALT II). It expired in 1985 without entering into force.
- **1981:** Convention to ban the use of **weapons deemed to be excessively injurious** or to have indiscriminate effects. This included certain types of ammunition that inflict great suffering on victims, booby traps and, under a 1996 amendment, undetectable anti-personnel land mines. The amendment also banned the use of non-self-destructing/deactivating antipersonnel land mines outside marked areas.
- **1982:** The UN General Assembly’s **second special session on disarmament** could not agree on a final document. China, France, and the Soviet Union made declarations on unilateral security assurances.
- **1985: Treaty of Rarotonga** establishing the South Pacific Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone was opened for signature.
- **1987:** UN Conference to promote international cooperation in the **peaceful uses of nuclear energy** met in Geneva but was unable to agree on text to reconcile principles of peaceful use with those related to non-proliferation. **Missile Technology Control Regime** to oversee international transfers is established by seven industrialized countries. w Agreement by the United States and the Soviet Union on the Elimination of **Intermediate-Range and Shorter Range Missiles** (INF Treaty). It arranged for the verified elimination\ of an entire class of missiles. Another agreement established Nuclear Risk Reduction Centers in Washington and



Moscow to exchange information and oversee notifications required under other arms agreements.

- **1988:** Agreement by the United States and the Soviet Union to provide **24-hour notification** of launches of land and submarine- based intercontinental ballistic missiles, with information on launch and impact areas.
- **1990:** The United States and the Soviet Union agreed to stop producing **chemical weapons** and begin destruction of existing stocks. Agreed to as a means of facilitating the multilateral Chemical Weapons Convention, the bilateral treaty set 31 December 2002 as the target for each party to reduce its holding to no more than 5,000 tons of chemical agents. Last **USSR** explosive nuclear test — moratorium continued by the Russian Federation. The treaty on **Conventional Forces in Europe** between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Warsaw Pact lowered and balanced the strength of armed forces. Its verification procedures survived the end of the Warsaw Pact in July 1991 and in 1999 they were amended to take account of national forces rather than bloc strength.
- **1991:** Last British explosive nuclear test. w **Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START)** agreed by the United States and the Russian Federation, reduced to 6,000 the number of “accountable warheads” each country could have, and set a limit for each of 1,600 deployed strategic nuclear delivery vehicles — bombers, intercontinental ballistic missiles and submarines capable of launching nuclear missiles. A few months after START was signed, the Soviet Union began to unravel, and it was not ratified by the Russian Duma till December 1994. The **Brazil-Argentina** Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials established. Last **United States** explosive nuclear test. Former Russian test site, **Semipalatinsk**, closed by newly independent Kazakhstan.
- **1992:** China and France acceded to the **NPT**. Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine signed the Lisbon Protocol to **START I**, agreeing to adhere to the NPT as non- nuclear - weapon States. The **Nuclear Suppliers Group** revised its guidelines to require full-scope IAEA safeguards as a condition of exporting dual-use technology.



- **1993:** The General Assembly adopted the **Chemical Weapons Convention**, the first globally verifiable multilateral disarmament treaty. It banned the production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons, and committed States parties to destroy all stocks. By the time it came into force in April 1997, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons was established at The Hague. **Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START II)** continued the cuts initiated by the United States and the Russian Federation under START I. By December 31, 2003, land-based ICBMs with multiple independently-targetable re-entry vehicles (MIRVs) would be completely eliminated and neither side would have more than 3,000-3,500 strategic nuclear warheads. START II was ratified by the United States in 1996 and in April 2000 by the Russian Federation. Under the 1997 Helsinki Protocol, the implementation deadline was extended to December 31, 2007. By that time, all delivery vehicles to be eliminated under START II are to be deactivated.
- **1995:** Security Council resolution 984 sets out **security assurances** to non-nuclear-weapon States that are parties to the NPT. The **Bangkok Treaty** established the South East Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone. It entered into force in 1997. w 33 States signed the “**Wassenaar Arrangement**” setting export controls for conventional arms and dual use goods and technologies. The nuclear **Non-Proliferation Treaty** was indefinitely extended, with strengthened accountability arrangements, incorporated into a process of annual preparatory meetings leading up to the five-year review conferences. As part of the agreement to extend the Treaty indefinitely, States Parties agreed to a set of Principles and Objectives, and adopted a resolution on the Middle East.
- **1996** Last explosive nuclear tests by **France** (January) and **China** (July). w The **International Court of Justice**, in an advisory opinion sought by the UN General Assembly on the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons, agreed unanimously that the nuclear-weapon States had “an obligation to ... bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament.” w **Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty** to stop all explosive nuclear tests adopted by a vote of 158 to 3 with 5 abstentions in the UN General Assembly, after the *Conference on Disarmament (CD)* was unable to reach consensus on the text it



negotiated. India blocked consensus in the CD on the grounds that the treaty did not cover non-explosive nuclear testing (sub critical and computer simulation), and was thus not comprehensive. The CTBT cannot come into force unless 44 nuclear-capable States listed in its annex ratify it. By the end of 2000, 41 of the 44 had signed (India, Pakistan and North Korea had not), and 28 had ratified, including Britain, France and the Russian Federation. The United States Senate rejected the treaty in 1999, but the Clinton Administration remained committed to ratification. Meanwhile, the Preparatory Commission for the CTBT Organization was established in Vienna (November 1996) and work began on establishing a global system to verify the comprehensive ban on explosive nuclear testing. **The Treaty of Pelindaba** established the African Nuclear- Weapon-Free Zone. **Summit on Nuclear Safety and Security** is held in Moscow in April.

- **1997:** The **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)** Board of Governors approved the Model Additional Protocol, strengthening safeguards. A comprehensive ban on **anti-personnel land mines** and destruction of existing stocks was agreed as the result of a process initiated by non-governmental organizations. The **Inter-American Convention** against the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, ammunition, explosives and other related material was approved by the Organization of American States annual assembly. This was the first regional treaty to address the serious problem of illicit flows of small arms and light weapons. **NATO and the Russian Federation** signed a “Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security,” agreeing to build a “lasting and inclusive peace in the Euro-Atlantic area.” US and Russia agreed at the summit-level on the outline of **START III** negotiations.
- **1998:** **India** and **Pakistan** conducted nuclear tests and declared themselves nuclear-weapon-States. **Bangkok Treaty** on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon- Free Zone entered into force. **Mongolia**’s declaration of its “nuclear -weapon-free status” was welcomed by the UN General Assembly.
- **1999:** the 50th anniversary meeting of **NATO** adopted a new strategic doctrine, affirming the role of nuclear weapons. The **Russian Federation** set out a new strategic doctrine,



affirming the role of nuclear weapons. w **India** issued a draft nuclear doctrine that said it would maintain a minimum deterrent capacity.

- **2000:** The sixth five-year Review Conference of the nuclear **Non-Proliferation Treaty** — the first since the indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995 — called for and received an “unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals, leading to nuclear disarmament.” The Conference also affirmed that “the total elimination of nuclear weapons is the only absolute guarantee against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.” It recognized the need for “legally binding security assurances by the five nuclear-weapon States” to the non-nuclear-weapon States Parties to the NPT, and called on the Preparatory Committee for the next Review Conference (in 2005), to make recommendations on the issue. The Conference also adopted a set of practical steps which pulled together disparate elements and set in place an agenda for continuing action.

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<http://disarmament.un.org/cab/salw-gares.htm>

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