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TO THE UNITED NATIONS

ON BEHALF OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM GROUP

TO THE FIFTY-NINTH SESSION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

FIRST COMMITTEE

ITEM 65 (z): GENERAL AND COMPLETE DISARMAMENT:
THE ILLICIT TRADE IN SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT
WEAPONS IN ALL ITS ASPECTS

NEW YORK, 20 OCTOBER 2004

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Mr Chairman

As current Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum Group, I am making this statement on behalf of Australia, Fiji, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and my own country, Samoa.

The problem of the illicit availability and use of small arms is very real for the communities and countries of the Pacific Island region. Although, in comparison to some other regions, the number of small arms in circulation in Pacific Island countries is small, the potential for their misuse to cause humanitarian and socio-economic harm, and even to destabilise governments, is great. In our region, the illicit possession and unlawful use of such weapons has exacerbated law and order problems and internal conflicts, undermining good governance and development. For these reasons, the members of the Pacific Islands Forum have worked assiduously to develop and implement a common regional approach to mitigate the small arms threat.

The most recent example of this coordinated approach and ongoing commitment to addressing small arms concerns was a regional workshop, sponsored by the governments of Japan and Australia and the UN regional centre for peace and disarmament in Asia and the Pacific, held in Nadi, Fiji in August 2004. Pacific Islands Forum members wish to thank the Japanese Government and the UN regional centre for their generous support for this
initiative. In consolidating the outcomes of previous regional workshops, the 2004 workshop was an invaluable forum for sharing experiences on the implementation of the UN Program of Action. It also served to advance the consideration of a model Weapons Control Bill that has been endorsed by Pacific Island Forum leaders as a basis for enacting and improving relevant legislation in national jurisdictions. Identifying and fixing legislative gaps through information-sharing and common efforts is a key strategy in our approach to better controlling small arms.

Participants in the Nadi workshop agreed on a number of practical initiatives, including

- Identifying national assistance needs, including any legislative and technical assistance requirements. To this end, the Pacific Islands Forum secretariat will develop a matrix of technical assistance and capacity-building requirements, to help match Pacific needs to possible resources.

- Using national reporting under the UN Program of Action as a tool for developing a more reliable knowledge base on quantities, sources and uses of small arms, and gaps in the implementation of controls. In particular, such reporting provides a mechanism for information-sharing and feedback, helping us to customise the model Weapons Control Bill to suit respective institutional and legislative requirements.
• Taking advantage of assistance provided by UNDP to fulfil UN reporting obligations.

• Exploring ways to further improve small arms security in the Pacific, including the development of follow-up training and stockpile management programs to build on recent progress made in improving the physical security of defence force armouries in the region.

Pacific Islands Forum members intend to report outcomes of these efforts to the Forum’s next annual leaders’ summit in 2005, to the 2005 UN small arms biennial meeting and to the 2006 UN small arms review conference. The latter two meetings will be important to consolidate the international community’s ongoing efforts to build an institutional framework capable of addressing the small arms threat in a holistic manner.

Mr Chairman

Through practical initiatives like the recent Nadi workshop, Pacific Island countries will continue to adopt a coordinated regional approach to addressing the small arms threat. In this context, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) was mandated under the Forum Leaders 2000 “Biketawa Declaration”, which states that assistance will be provided to a member, upon request “on the basis of all Forum members being part of the extended Pacific Family”. The mission has had good results in its first year, not least because of the extensive participation of a large number of Pacific Island Forum countries. Since it began in July 2003, RAMSI has overseen the passage of relevant legislation and the surrender or
confiscation of 3700 illegal firearms, helping to restore stability and law, consolidating government finances and laying the groundwork for long-term governance reform. RAMSI stands as a cooperative example of a region’s practical response to small arms and related threats.

Similarly, there has been continued rapid progress in weapons disposal efforts in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea. As noted in the recent Secretary-General’s report to the Security Council (S/2004/771 of 29 September 2004), 1841 weapons, or 92.6% of the total collected, have now been destroyed. This steady progress in weapons disposal, in addition to the recruitment and training of additional police, has contributed to improved law and order and stability throughout the province.

Despite the achievements and progress that Pacific Islands Forum countries have made, we are not immune – and in many ways highly vulnerable – to the destabilising presence and proliferation of small arms and to targeting by unscrupulous arm traders and other opportunists. We are determined to continue to address these threats and challenges through concerted regional action.

Thank you Mr Chairman.