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STATEMENT

by

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to the United Nations

On the issue of Conventional Weapons

at the

Sixty-third Session of the
United Nations General Assembly’s First Committee

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United Nations Headquarters
New York
October 21, 2008
Mr. Chairman

Trinidad and Tobago is honoured and privileged to participate in these deliberations on disarmament and international security, as they relate to conventional weapons. We also align ourselves with the statement delivered by Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned ("NAM") and Barbados on behalf of the Caribbean Community ("CARICOM"). Of particular importance to us, is the question of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and its impact on the security and development of States. Indeed for developing States, it is a critical issue. As it pursues its development agenda, a curb on this unlawful activity is becoming an area of increased focus for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

In Trinidad and Tobago as in many other States in the Caribbean, the surge in violence in recent years, to a large extent, is attributable to a proliferation in the use of illegal firearms. Although we are not producers of small arms or light weapons, we bear a disproportionate part of the burden of the trade and its associated nefarious elements which have far-reaching implications for the socio-economic development of our societies. This is due in part to the absence of common international standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional weapons in general.

Trinidad and Tobago is committed to achieving its development goals which include the Millennium Development Goals. Our progress however could be stymied by the need, in recent years, to re-direct resources as we strive to deal with the negative consequences of the trade. We therefore welcome all multilateral initiatives aimed at addressing the challenges arising from this problem. Among these is the Biennial Meeting of States to consider the implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, which was convened here, United Nations Headquarters, in July of this year. Trinidad and Tobago served on the Bureau of that meeting and was among those States which submitted national reports pursuant to the programme of action. We view international cooperation in this area as being fundamental to the eradication of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and its link to the commission of serious crimes.

We, at the same time, commend the work of the Group of Governmental Experts appointed by the Secretary-General to examine the feasibility, scope and draft parameters for a comprehensive, legally binding instrument establishing common standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional arms. The work of this Group of Experts, as reflected in the Secretary-General’s report, document A/63/334, serves as a sound basis upon which we can build, as we work together on the question of the international trade in conventional arms. We find tremendous merit too in the contention that the absence of common international standards for the transfer of arms has proven to be a contributory factor to the threat to international peace and security, the prolongation of conflicts, the escalation of organized crime and the undermining of sustainable development.

Mr. Chairman

Preventing the spread and misuse of conventional weapons is a multifaceted issue. It requires a range of measures to address both the supply and demand for weapons. This was in fact the objective of a regional meeting held in Antigua and Barbuda earlier this month attended by regional governments and civil society. The impact of armed violence on Caribbean development constituted an integral aspect of the discussions and Trinidad and Tobago supports the meeting’s outcome which called for the negotiation of a legally binding arms trade treaty which must be consistent with the principles of the United Nations Charter, as well as the provisions of international law, particularly international human
rights law and international humanitarian law.

We are convinced that the time is ripe for international action to tackle this issue. We will continue to work with the United Nations, other multilateral agencies, inter-governmental organizations, and civil society as we strive to resolve this problem to the benefit of our citizenry and the promotion of sustainable development and the eradication of poverty.

Thank you.