UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE TO REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION TO PREVENT, COMBAT AND ERADICATE THE
ILlicit TRADE IN SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS IN ALL ITS ASPECTS

27 AUGUST - 7 SEPTEMBER 2012
NEW YORK

STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE
MEMBERS OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM

FOR DISTRIBUTION
Madame President, I have the honour to speak on behalf of the members of the Pacific Islands Forum in the UN: Australia, Kiribati, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

For many years the illicit trade, possession and use of small arms and light weapons (SALW) has posed a threat to the stability and security of Pacific communities. As well as fuelling conflict and armed violence and contributing to criminal activity, their ready availability increases the potential for violence in local disputes and exacerbates existing conflicts. Moreover, recent reports have highlighted a number of arms trafficking cases in and through the region, with several substantial interdictions indicating the establishment of sophisticated trafficking networks in the Pacific linked to organised crime groups.

The impact of even a small number of illicit weapons in small, tightly-knit communities such as those in the Pacific can be devastating. Conflicts fuelled by SALW exacted a terrible toll on the people of the Solomon Islands and the island of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea during the 1990s. The illicit trade, possession and use of such weapons poses a direct challenge to Forum Leaders' vision of the Pacific as a region of peace, harmony, security and economic prosperity respected for the quality of its governance, the sustainable management of its resources, the full observance of democratic values, and the defense and promotion of human rights.

Madam President, effectively addressing threats posed by SALW can pose significant challenges for small states with limited human, technical and financial resources and numerous competing policy priorities. Regional approaches have therefore proved vital to Pacific states in supporting national policies and activities. In 1996, Forum Leaders called for regional collaboration to control the movement of weapons, leading to the development of the Honiara Initiative and the Nadi Framework. These in turn were grounded in the security-related principles and priorities earlier articulated by Leaders in the Honiara and Aitutaki Declarations, and subsequently influenced the development of the Pacific Plan, which includes security as one of its four pillars. In 2009 and 2010 Forum Leaders endorsed further regional activities relating to the control of SALW and encouraged efforts to build relevant national and regional capacities.

Drawing on these frameworks, Pacific states have adopted a range of measures at the national level to address SALW-related challenges and to advance POA implementation, including the declaration of Weapons Free Zones to advance disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration efforts, gun amnesties, national SALW conferences and summits, and projects to strengthen legislation, stockpile management and firearms registration.

Support for POA implementation continues to be provided through the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and regional law enforcement organisations such as the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police, the Oceania Customs Organisation, the Pacific Transnational Crimes
Network as well as the Pacific Islands Law Officers Network and various SALW-related civil society organisations.

As outlined in our joint discussion paper with CARICOM, we have also advanced regional initiatives to support domestic SALW regulatory activities and POA implementation. These include: the development of regional resources, such as a Model Weapons Bill and a Firearms Safety Manual; the provision of technical assistance for adapting these for domestic use; bilateral and regional partnerships to build and/or upgrade national armouries, and to train personnel in weapons management and surplus weapon and ammunition destruction; the promotion of regional information sharing through regional law enforcement and border control networks, and capacity building support for relevant domestic agencies; and the development of regional guidelines to direct regional activities, such as the Forum Regional POA Implementation Guidelines adopted in 2010. Continued support from regional and international partners will remain essential for building on these efforts, particularly through strengthening the capacity of relevant national agencies.

Oversight of these activities is provided the Forum Regional Security Committee (FRSC) and by annual meetings of Forum Leaders. Since 2006 Forum States have also held two regional meetings to discuss SALW issues and consider ways to strengthen regional support for national implementation. Following the most recent of these in March this year, the Forum Members agreed on a number of further actions, including preparation of a gap analysis to identify national legislative needs and of a national implementation matrix to identify priority areas for assistance and support, as well as consideration of options for the Forum Secretariat to play a greater role in supporting its Members in seeking and coordinating international assistance and facilitating regional reporting. Forum members are also currently exploring the establishment of a Technical Experts Group to facilitate the sharing of regional technical expertise to support national SALW activities and POA implementation.

Madam President, a number of issues were highlighted at the most recent Pacific regional workshop that are of relevance to our discussions over the next two weeks.

a) First, Forum members are acutely aware of the negative impact SALW-fuelled conflict and violence can have on sustainable development and poverty alleviation. Conflict disrupts normal trade and economic activity, undermining livelihoods and placing increased pressures on family units. It results in the destruction of physical infrastructure and the disruption of social services, and leads to a climate of fear, instability and insecurity and a reduced quality of life for affected populations. Communities that have suffered the effects of violent conflict - including several in the Pacific - understand the links between illicit SALW, security and development only too well. We hope it will also be possible for this meeting to formally acknowledge them.

b) Secondly, like many small states, Forum countries face inherent difficulties in regularly submitting POA reports due to resource constraints and challenges with
interagency coordination and the collection of relevant data. Forum members are exploring possible measures to strengthen national reporting, including the establishment of national coordinating bodies and options for preparing implementation reports on a regional basis. For its part, the UN must ensure reporting templates are as simple and user-friendly as possible, and that requirements are both realistic and flexible, in order to facilitate enhanced reporting and minimise compliance burdens.

c) Thirdly, Forum members recognise the vital role played by National Points of Contact (NPC) in coordinating national SALW measures and sharing relevant information and expertise; and have agreed to intensify efforts to nominate NPCs. Provision of guidance and resources concerning the roles, obligations and best practices associated with NPCs would be useful in this regard.

d) Fourthly, like most small states, Forum members have found prioritisation of national implementation efforts essential. Each country’s priorities are determined by their individual needs and circumstances, but for many Pacific countries they include: enhancing national coordination mechanisms; strengthening relevant national legislation, regulations, and standard operating procedures; improving stockpile management, security and accounting procedures; and improving national border controls, by sharing information and enhancing relevant domestic capacities and capabilities. We hope these priorities will be adequately reflected in our discussions and in planning for the next Review Cycle.

e) Fifthly, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have proved indispensable partners in supporting POA monitoring and implementation in the Pacific, as they have in most parts of the world. In recognition of their important contribution on security matters, the Forum Secretariat convenes bi-annual dialogue meetings with partner organisations to discuss priorities and obtain input on common issues to guide regional decision-making. We hope this meeting will also be able to acknowledge and support the important role played by NGOs in the POA.

f) Finally, predictability in meeting schedules and commitments is important for small states; and we therefore welcome efforts to agree a clearer vision of such commitments for the coming POA Review Cycle. For their part, Forum members will seek to align their own relevant meetings and activities as closely as possible with the proposed schedule.

To conclude, Madam President, the countries of the Pacific Islands Forum look forward to working with you and with other Member States to ensure this POA Review Conference is the success we need it to be.