Draft Statement

Agenda Item 7a (i) Preventing, combating, eradicating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects at the national level, the regional level and the global level

March 19, 2012

Madam Chair, permit me at the outset to congratulate you and the members of the Bureau on your election. My delegation is confident that under your leadership and that with the support of your Bureau this preparatory process will be steered to a successful outcome.

Belize aligns itself with the statement delivered by Jamaica on behalf of CARICOM.

My delegation reaffirms the importance of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its aspects; its value and relevance as the single, normative framework for addressing the illicit trade is SALW is undiminished, indeed the POA is needed more than ever.

Madam Chair, the continuing threat to human security and development posed by the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons manifests itself in Belize where we have experienced increases in the number of confiscated firearms and ammunition, increases in the number of homicides involving firearms, and increases in the number of crimes generally involving firearms. Indeed the percentage of homicides committed with firearms in Belize is well above the global average. None of the firearms used in these murders were produced in Belize. And impact of the proliferation of illegal firearms has been far reaching affecting our economic, human and social development.

My delegation views the forthcoming Review Conference as the timely occasion to review the progress of implementation of the POA and to explore ways to strengthen its implementation. We expect a substantive outcome in September, one which reflects our renewed collective political commitment, one which strengthens its implementation, and one which clearly defines follow up mechanisms. Towards this end, we expect that this Preparatory Meeting will set the procedural and organizational arrangements conducive to such an outcome, as well as recommend substantive elements to form the basis of an outcome document.

The fight to prevent and combat the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons is one to which my government accords the highest priority. Our national efforts have included improving legislation regarding controls for international firearms transfers, acquiring
equipment for marking and record keeping, improving stockpile management, destroying confiscated firearms – and we hope to soon acquire equipment for this purpose, capacity building of policy makers and law enforcement personnel; and we have undertaken a legislative gap analysis to identify areas where domestic legislation requires revision to ensure full compliance with international obligations including not only the POA but also the Inter-American Convention Against Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms. International assistance and cooperation has been instrumental to supporting national implementation efforts.

Nevertheless implementation challenges at the national level persist, and in this regard my delegation underscores the necessity for sustained and focused international assistance, guided by the key principle of national ownership. No doubt the national level apparatus necessary to respond to the challenge of the illicit trade in SALW is unique in a small, non-manufacturing, non-exporting State, such as Belize which imports very low volume of firearms.

From our national level perspective my delegation wishes to underscore the need for deeper focus and commitment in the following areas: stockpile management and destruction, border controls, reporting capacity and brokering. Diversion from government held stockpiles remains a main source for small arms diverted into the illegal trade and weak border controls facilitate the flow of such. We should redouble our efforts to build capacity, strengthen legislation and deliver technical assistance in these areas.

Small states like Belize face reporting challenges which constrain our best intentions and efforts, we naturally support CARICOM's call for technical assistance in this respect.

Madam Chair,

The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons is transnational in nature, we have found a regional approach to be both effective and necessary. Belize participates in several regional initiatives both in the CARICOM and Central American contexts, including efforts to strengthen trans-border customs cooperation and sharing of intelligence. In this regard we call for the strengthening of capacities of regional organizations involved in the implementation of regional strategies or programmes to improve cross border controls.

Madam Chair,

The discussion on cross border controls should no longer be sidelined, and must form a key part of efforts to address the illicit trade in SALW. Measures to strengthen sea, air and
land borders can substantially contribute to preventing the diversion of weapons into the illicit trade.

In a similar vein, at the *global level* my delegation fully supports CARICOM's proposal for the establishment of an *Inter Agency mechanism* to bring together agencies with mandates to strengthen cross border controls.

Civil society has played an instrumental role in the POA process from galvanizing international action, to building awareness to supporting implementation. Their continued involvement must be encouraged as well as that of industry.

Madam Chair, my delegation in this intervention has highlighted a number of areas in which progress has been achieved but where there is clearly scope for deeper commitments, more intense focus and collective action as we work to strengthen the POA.

I thank you.