STATEMENT

ON BEHALF OF THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM)

BY

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AT THE

Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in 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

UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS

NEW YORK

MARCH 19, 2012

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Madam Chair,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the fourteen Member States of the Caribbean Community.

Let me at the outset congratulate you on your election as the Chair of the 2012 UN POA Review Conference and its Preparatory Session. I wish also to commend the forthright, open and transparent manner in which you have guided the process so far and to assure you of the full support and cooperation of CARICOM in the discharge of your duties as Chair, particularly in maintaining efficient time management.

We extend congratulations to Ms. Angela Kane on her appointment as High Representative for Disarmament Affairs.

Madam Chair,

Combating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons has been a priority for CARICOM Member States. Consequently, the region has been firm and consistent in its support of the Programme of Action and its implementation since its adoption in 2001. CARICOM countries do not engage in the manufacture, export or re-export of SALW. Nor is our Community a large-scale importer of such weapons. However, over the last decade our region has suffered from the devastating impact of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. We have witnessed increases in the proliferation of illegal firearms, an increase in homicides involving firearms and in violent crime generally. According to the 2007 World Bank Report on Crime, Violence and Development in the Caribbean, the murder rates in the Caribbean are higher than for any other region in the world. Small arms and light weapons are used in the commission of more than 70% of those murders. But the impact of the circulation of illegal firearms extends beyond crime and security issues. The violence that these weapons engender has adversely impacted our region’s human, social and economic development: destroying families, burdening our healthcare system and threatening our livelihood. For us the impact of the illicit trade in SALW on our security and development is real.

CARICOM views the POA as the single comprehensive, normative framework to address the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons to which all Member States subscribe. We reaffirm our
commitment to its implementation at the national, regional and global levels and we welcome the opportunity of the review conference to assess the progress of implementation at the three levels as well as explore ways of strengthening the implementation of the POA.

Madam Chair,

Allow me to offer our region's views first on the progress of implementation at the three levels, which, from our perspective, are interlinked. Member States of CARICOM have sought at the national levels to implement the POA by making efforts to improve legislation, by acquiring equipment to marking of firearms, effective tracing of and by building the capacity of law enforcement personnel. We have made efforts to improve the security of government held stockpiles and have safely destroyed confiscated firearms.

Nevertheless implementation challenges remain. There is need in our region for more international cooperation and assistance focused in the areas of technical assistance to facilitate reporting and legislative drafting, capacity building in intelligence gathering and analysis, in prosecutorial and investigative techniques, and in forensics.

Madam Chair,

CARICOM believes that given the transnational nature of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, action and cooperation at the regional level are critical to combating the illicit trade. As our region has stated on numerous occasions, we consider effective and robust cross border controls as essential to preventing diversion and stemming the tide of the illicit trade in SALW. For our part we have given greater focus on regional cooperation in security matters generally, including the combating of the illicit trade in SALW.

In July 2011, CARICOM Heads of Government adopted a regional Declaration on Small Arms and Light Weapons, reflecting the deepening concern about the easy access to illicit small arms and light weapons and ammunition, as well as the adverse effects such weapons have had on our societies. The Declaration, which carries the highest level of political commitment, is a platform for regional action to combat SALW and, inter alia, expresses the commitment at the highest political level for the full compliance of CARICOM States with the obligations contained in the POA. We offer
this regional Declaration as a best practice to reaffirm regional support for and commitment to the full and effective implementation of the POA; as well as the foundation for future action at the regional level.

In addition, we have undertaken a number of other initiatives to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in SALW and to improve the security of the region generally. The CARICOM Council of Ministers for Security and Law Enforcement, has, as its administrative arm the CARICOM Implementation Agency for Crime and Security, (IMPACS). One of the responsibilities entrusted to IMPACS is that of implementing the region’s collective response to the security challenges we face. In this context, IMPACS has facilitated the training of over 200 border security officials from across the Member States of CARICOM and maintains the CARICOM Intelligence Sharing Network (CISNET) enabling a coordinated approach to intelligence sharing to improve border protection. IMPACS is also in the process of developing a Regional Integrated Ballistic Information Network to support Member States of CARICOM in identifying ammunition and firearms used in the commission of crimes, this information can in turn assist Member States in identifying sources and routes of the movement of illicit firearms. IMPACS has also begun an initiative to map relevant projects ongoing in CARICOM Member States to enable us to obtain a better picture of where gaps may exist.

CARICOM believes that one concrete way in which we can make progress in the implementation of the POA at the regional level is through the development of an electronic platform for the sharing of best practices of effective programmes and initiatives implemented at the regional level would be helpful in facilitating other sub-regions and regions who may wish to replicate such effective programmes.

Madam Chair,

The trade in small arms and light weapons is truly of global scope with an estimated value of more than US$7 billion, and the value of the illicit trade is also estimated to run into the billions. The implementation of the POA at the global level is of utmost importance. As a region we face the challenge of securing long, porous and remote land and sea borders in a geographic area which serves as a transit route for transnational organized criminal activity moving south to north.
We call for greater focus on strengthening cross border controls at the global level; in this regard we propose the establishment of an Inter Agency Mechanism to bring together the existing expertise and work already being done by various agencies at the global level including the World Customs Organization, Interpol, the UN 1540 Committee, the Counter Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED) and others. These agencies we know are doing good work to improve border security of Member States by assisting in reforming administrative procedures and legislation, modernizing infrastructure, and building capacity of border security officials. An inter agency mechanism would streamline the assistance being provide, avoid duplication and improve coordination.

There is from our perspective greater scope for international cooperation and assistance, especially for small states facing resource constraints. CARICOM Member States have signed an MOU with the United States to facilitate cooperation in the tracing of firearms through the e-trace programme. Additionally, border and port security, firearm interdiction and the building of capacity among law enforcement personnel are key components of the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative in which our sub-region participates along with the United States of America.

Our region has also benefited at the regional and national levels from international assistance in the areas of stockpile management, weapons destruction and firearms marking. We value the partnerships forged with the Organization of American States and with the UN Regional for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Madam Chair,

As we move ahead, in exploring ways to strengthen the POA we must consider matters both of substance and of process. On the former CARICOM believes that there are other issues related to the POA which should find natural inclusion in our discussion such as armed violence, which is directly linked to the circulation of SALW, the gender dimension and scope for consideration of new technologies and how the POA can evolve when necessary. There is also a need to explore effective ways of measuring implementation of the POA and the impact that implementation has had. And we would support the establishment of a Trust Fund to support implementation.
In terms of process, the first Meeting of Government Experts, was in our view very successful in bringing together the experts working daily at the national level to exchange views on implementation challenges, and best practices. This exchange at the expert, technical level serves to strengthen implementation and we support its continuation. Whereas, the Biennial Meetings in the years between Review Conference should be focused thematically, to deepen our understanding and commitments about particular areas of the POA. By this approach future Review Conferences can take a “big picture” view of the POA, providing Member States with opportunities to assess progress and to strengthen the POA.

Madam Chair,

    CARICOM expects that the discussions at this Prep Com will lead us toward a substantive outcome at the Review Conference; an outcome which serves to strengthen implementation of the POA and we will work towards this end.

I thank you.