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PREPARATORY COMMITTEE FOR THE
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

19-20 MARCH, NEW YORK

STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE
MEMBERS OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM

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

The illicit trade and illegal use of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) continues to threaten stability and security in the Pacific, and has contributed to conflict and armed violence in a number of states in the region. SALW also continue to be used in the region for the commission of criminal offences, and greatly raise the potential for violence in local disputes. Recent reports have highlighted a number of arms trafficking cases in and through the region, with seizures of firearms ranging from handguns to high powered assault rifles.

These challenges have highlighted for our members the integral link between the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons, the maintenance of peace, stability and public safety, and prospects for sustainable development. And they make the framework provided by the Programme of Action (POA) for states to address the illicit trade in and illegal use of SALW as relevant and important to our region as ever.

To help Pacific states prepare for this year’s Review Conference, the Government of Australia funded and co-hosted a Regional Workshop in Brisbane, Australia on 29 February-2 March 2012 which inter alia considered activities for enhancing the implementation of the POA. We acknowledge the support of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and Oxfam Australia, and the participation of other regional and international partners, including UNODA and CARICOM.

Key issues addressed at the workshop were opportunities for (i) strengthening national ownership and implementation; (ii) enhancing regional approaches; (iii) supporting greater coordination and assistance; and (iv) identifying priority areas for action at the national and regional levels.

**Strengthening national ownership and implementation**

Pacific states recognise the vital role of National Points of Contact (NPC) for the POA in coordinating national SALW measures and sharing relevant information and expertise. PIF States are intensifying efforts to ensure all countries in our region have nominated NPCs prior to this year’s Review Conference.

Pacific states also recognise the importance of national POA reporting for providing data on implementation and identifying specific assistance needs. Many small states face inherent difficulties in submitting reports given resource constraints combined with challenges associated with interagency communication and coordination and the collection of relevant data. Measures are being considered to address these issues, including through the possible
establishment of national inter-agency working groups.

National measures have been undertaken in many Pacific states to address small arms-related challenges and advance POA implementation. For example, the Solomon Islands declared itself a Weapons Free Zone in 2003 to advance its DDR efforts following civil conflict. Gun amnesties were held in Samoa in 2005 and in the Cook Islands in 2011. A Firearms Census Project is currently being undertaken in Vanuatu. While a Gun Summit held in Papua New Guinea in 2005 produced more than 100 concrete recommendations; many of which are being included in a National Programme of Action currently being finalised. PIF states are also discussing aligning their national SALW and public safety strategies with the POA.

Strengthening and supporting regional approaches

Most Pacific countries are small island developing states, with limited human and financial resources and many competing policy priorities. Regional approaches to supporting POA implementation are therefore important. In the Pacific, these have been centred on the Pacific Islands Forum and its Secretariat, with important parallel work coordinated through regional law enforcement organisations such as the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP) and the Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO), as well as the Pacific Islands Law Officers Network (PILON) and SALW-related civil society organisations.

Regional POA implementation is rooted in the principles and priorities outlined in the security pillar of the Pacific Plan, and related agreements by Pacific Leaders in the Honiara, Aitutaki, Biketawa and Nasonini Declarations. Since Pacific Leaders first called for regional collaboration to control the movement of weapons in 1996, PIF states have sought to coordinate their efforts through: (i) regional activities such as the Honiara Initiative, the Nadi Framework and the development of a Regional Model Weapons Bill; and (ii) regional structures such as the Forum’s Regional Security Committee. In 2009 and 2010, Forum Leaders further endorsed activities relating to the implementation of the POA and encouraged all efforts to build national and regional capacity for its effective and successful implementation.

Last month’s Pacific regional workshop considered ways to strengthen regional support for national implementation. Options being considered include: (i) conducting a gap analysis to identify national legislative needs; (ii) preparing a national implementation matrix to identify priority areas for assistance and support; and (iii) providing a greater role for the PIF Secretariat in seeking and coordinating international assistance. PIF states are also considering intensifying POA implementation by exploring possible options for prioritising action under the Pacific Plan.

One specific option under consideration is the establishment of a regional
SALW Technical Experts Group to facilitate the transfer and sharing of regional technical expertise to support national implementation. This proposal will be further discussed during the next meeting of the Forum Regional Security Committee in June.

Reporting obligations pose particular challenges for small states. POA reporting requirements need to be both realistic and flexible to facilitate enhanced reporting and minimise compliance burdens. Reporting templates should be as simple and user friendly as possible. The Pacific Islands Forum is exploring options for facilitating national reporting and relevant data collection by its members. One option being considered is to provide the Forum Secretariat with a greater role in coordinating and submitting national reports with the approval and support of national governments.

International Cooperation and Assistance

Enhancing the core capacities of relevant national agencies is fundamental to achieving effective POA implementation, and for this support from bilateral, regional and international partners is vital.

For small states with limited resources, prioritisation of national implementation efforts is essential. Each country’s priorities will be determined by their individual needs and circumstances, but for many Pacific states they include: (i) enhancing national coordination mechanism; (ii) developing and enhancing relevant national legislation, regulations, and standard operating procedures; (iii) improving stockpile management, security and accounting procedures; and (iv) improving national border controls, in particular by enhancing domestic capacities and abilities to detect the illicit importation and transhipment of SALW. Provision of guidance and resources regarding the roles, obligations and best practices associated with NPCs would also be useful.

Civil society organisations play an important role in supporting POA monitoring and implementation in many developing countries, including in the Pacific. Their role in the POA needs to be acknowledged and supported.

POA Follow-up Mechanisms

Madame Chair, for small states, predictability in meeting schedules and commitments is important. The POA would benefit in this regard from a longer-term approach to determining the schedule, format and focus of meetings in each review cycle.

In conclusion, Madame Chair, the countries of the Pacific Islands Forum look forward to working with you and with other Member States to ensure this year’s Review Conference is the success we need it to be.