Thank you, Mr Chair.

I represent the Pacific Foundation for the Advancement of Women (PACFAW), a regional network of 8 Pacific island National Councils of Women based in Suva, Fiji and a member of the IANSA Women’s Network.

Various UN agreements and documents now acknowledge the critical role of women in effective implementation of peace and arms control policies and processes. These include UN Security Council and General Assembly Resolutions, the outcome documents of BMS 4, 5, and 6, and the ATT among others. Failure to fully include women as equal partners in these efforts is a waste of half of all human resources.

Assumptions and stereotypes about women as vulnerable subjects and victims in conflict situations, have been replaced by a clear recognition of the critical role that women play in the solutions.

For any productive policy intervention, we need to ensure that the proposed solution will not have disproportionate negative effects on girls or women, boys or men. We must ask whether policy options derive from unspoken assumptions about gender attitudes and stereotypes.

Sadly, gender bias and stereotypes still hinder the meaningful participation of women in small arms policy implementation. Let me give an example from my region.

When women in two Pacific countries mobilised to remove the provision in their gun laws that allows for civilian possession of firearms, resistance and criticism came from men with comments like: “What do they know about guns and gun laws? Tell them to stick to their needles and thread!” and another, “They should just focus on making tea and leave the serious business of guns to those who are qualified to talk about it.” These kinds of attitudes Mr Chair, continue to reinforce the exclusion of women with their knowledge and lived experiences, from the small arms processes – to the detriment of the world.

We stress that guns and intimate-partner violence are a fatal combination for women. Globally, over one third of murders of women are committed by a male intimate partner, often with guns. In areas of conflict, sexual violence perpetrated by armed intimidation is an unending scourge.

Moreover, in both conflict and crime settings women bear a heavy burden – psychological, social and economic – when male family members are injured or killed. They are more than qualified to be at the negotiating table, since they are already doing so at the local levels.

Mr Chair, there is no shortage of wonderful and progressive words that recognise, reaffirm and promote the equal and full partnership of women and men in the promotion and attainment of sustainable peace and security – and the role of women
in disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.

What is urgently needed is the commitment and political will to turn those words into action. Perhaps we could start by asking how many states have included women in their official delegations? Not as tokenism but as part of a genuine attempt to integrate women’s knowledge.

Mr Chair, we’ve had enough rhetoric. What we need now is action.

One way forward is for governments to endorse the new Call to Action by Civil Society on Gender and Small Arms Control, which we have provided to delegates here at the RevCon.

In the past few months, civil society led by the IANSA Women’s Network, distributed the draft Call to Action to peace and disarmament networks and UN agencies, for input and responses. The Call to Action was also distributed to member states, and we thank States that agreed to take up the role of regional champion. We welcome other States that are willing to play this role.

The final version is now available for your endorsement and use. A few key recommendations from the Call to Action are:

1. Supporting and funding initiatives to strengthen women’s capacity and skills to participate fully in the small arms process.
2. Funding research and analysis highlighting the gendered effects of armed violence.
3. Challenge predominant gender stereotypes that associate masculinity with violence, and balance these with peace education that promotes tolerance, gender equality.

In summary, we urge a thorough inclusion of gender perspectives in small arms control policies, programmes and activities in all settings and at all levels. This includes addressing the gendered nature of ownership and use of small arms, the differentiated effects of small arms on women and men, and the ways in which gender roles can shape small arms policies and practices.

We also welcome the Secretary-General’s new Agenda for Disarmament, in which he stated that “The equal, full, and effective participation of women in all decision-making processes related to disarmament is essential for the promotion and attainment of sustainable peace and security.”

We encourage you to endorse the Call to Action as an important complement to the Secretary-General’s approach.

I thank you Mr Chair.