



The
Bahamas

**58th SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**FIRST COMMITTEE
DISARMAMENT AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY**

GENERAL DEBATE

**STATEMENT BY H.E. PAULETTE BETHEL
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

**ON BEHALF
OF
THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY [CARICOM]**

9 OCTOBER, 2003

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Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the fourteen members of the Caribbean Community [CARICOM], that are members of the United Nations, namely Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and my own country, The Bahamas. CARICOM delegations congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, and the other members of your Bureau, on your election to guide the work of this most challenging and important committee, and we are confident that you will guide our work to a successful conclusion. We pledge our full support and cooperation in this regard.

CARICOM delegations wish to pay tribute to the work of Mr. Jayantha Dhanapala, former Undersecretary General for Disarmament Affairs, for his years of dedicated service, and extend congratulations to Mr. Nobuyase Abe, on his recent appointment to succeed Mr. Dhanapala. We offer Mr. Abe our fullest cooperation and thank him for his introductory remarks highlighting some of the more pressing disarmament and international security issues facing the First Committee at this session, including that of its organizational reform. CARICOM delegations also wish to pay tribute to the staff of the Department for Disarmament Affairs, for their sterling work throughout the year.

Mr. Chairman,

A brief survey of the current climate prevailing in the disarmament and arms control arena does not inspire much confidence that we, as the Member States of the United Nations, are living up to our obligations contained in the Charter of this Organisation to preserve international peace and security. As CARICOM delegations affirmed before this body last year, the progressive reduction of armaments and achievement of the goal of general and complete disarmament are inextricably linked to attaining and maintaining peace and security, and enabling us to reach our stated goal of the peaceful settlement of disputes.

2003 has been a year of setbacks for the multilateral disarmament regime, as confidence in critical treaties has been undermined, agreement on enhanced verification measures remains elusive, stalemate still prevails in the Conference on Disarmament and global military expenditures continue to rise. It is perhaps not surprising then that proposals have come from varied quarters to re-examine the role of this Committee in promoting the disarmament agenda. CARICOM States welcome the intention of you, Mr. Chairman, to engage in informal consultations with the members of the Committee in an effort to revitalise and rationalise the work of this Committee, in concert with the ongoing process of the revitalisation of the General Assembly as a whole.

CARICOM states are also aware that a number of delegations have undertaken bilateral consultations on this matter. We welcome the transparency and frank dialogue that have characterised the process thus far, and look forward to continuing discussions on practical and realistic ways in which to make the work of this Committee, and thus the General Assembly as a whole, have a greater impact on

the global disarmament agenda, and the current threats facing the international community. We would wish to sound a note of caution, however, that in seeking to make the Committee more relevant we do not achieve the opposite, by removing certain issues from this Committee's purview, or by choosing to eliminate, due to lack of progress, consideration of issues that remain unresolved.

Mr. Chairman,

The issue of weapons of mass destruction has been in the forefront of international peace and security over the past year. CARICOM states have noted with concern that some of the critical legal instruments governing the multilateral disarmament agenda have come under threat or have stalled in implementation in 2003. We reaffirm our commitment to the implementation of the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons [NPT]. We also call on all States Parties to the NPT to fully implement their obligations under Article VI of the Treaty, and the commitments made at the 2000 NPT Review Conference.

In this context, CARICOM states also call for a renewed commitment to promoting the entry into force, and the implementation of both the letter and the spirit of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty [CTBT]. As we are all aware, just one month ago, the Third Conference on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the CTBT met to accelerate the Treaty's entry into force. Regrettably, that goal remains elusive due to the absence of prompt signature and ratification of the CTBT by those states whose ratification is needed for its entry into force. We applaud the work of the Provisional Technical Secretariat of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty Organisation [CTBTO] in promoting the entry into force of the treaty, particularly its regional activities in this regard. For their part, CARICOM states participated in a regional seminar, held in Jamaica in December 2002, designed to promote universal adherence to the CTBT in the Latin American and Caribbean region. We also welcome the conclusion of a cooperation agreement between the CTBTO and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean [OPANAL], the first of its kind for the CTBTO.

We are strongly committed to the process of regional cooperation in promoting nuclear non-proliferation, and the creation of nuclear-weapon-free zones. It is a source of immense satisfaction to CARICOM States that the Treaty of Tlatelolco now commands universal adherence in Latin America and the Caribbean, and CARICOM looks forward to the convening of the Eighteenth session of the General Conference of OPANAL, to be held in Havana, Cuba, in November of this year. We encourage other States engaged in discussions to create nuclear-weapon-free zones to continue to move those processes forward in pursuit of the important goal of non-proliferation.

Mr. Chairman,

We, as members of the international community, have committed ourselves to the control and elimination of certain types of weapons, having recognised the indiscriminate and devastating effects that these weapons have on military and civilian populations alike. In this context, CARICOM States are committed to the

enforcement of the Conventions governing the development, production and use of chemical and biological weapons. In this context, CARICOM States are also committed to a process of developing and enhancing verification arrangements governing the development, production and use of biological weapons, as a means to promote greater levels of confidence among States.

Mr. Chairman,

While the spectre of weapons of mass destruction hangs over us all, the international community has rightly recognised and decided to act on the growing threat posed by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. CARICOM States are strongly committed to the implementation of the Programme of Action adopted by the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, held in July, 2001. It is no exaggeration to assert that small arms and light weapons pose the single biggest threat to the national security, and economic and social development of many of our small countries, as well as those countries in other regions of the world plagued by intra and inter state conflict. As stated by CARICOM delegations at the Conference itself and in other fora since that time, small arms and light weapons in our region have been used by those that would seek to destabilise the region through criminal networks involved in the trafficking of drugs, weapons and human beings. These activities pose a dangerous challenge to our security infrastructure and are helping to undermine the economic and social fabric of our nations, as they contribute to a rise in crime, particularly violent crime.

Faced with this multi-faceted threat, CARICOM States have welcomed the degrees of cooperation undertaken at the bilateral, sub-regional, regional and international levels, including through the work of the CARICOM Secretariat, the Organization of American States and the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, all of whom have provided assistance in the implementation of the Programme of Action and other agreements aimed at controlling the proliferation of these weapons.

However, as acknowledged at the First Biennial Meeting of States to Review Implementation of the Programme of Action held in July of this year, far too much remains to be done. We consider the Programme of Action a small, but important first step that must be augmented by commitments to establish transfer controls in producer countries, to regulate brokering, and to facilitate the reliable and harmonised marking and tracing of small arms and light weapons. We also call on producer States to exercise greater levels of scrutiny of end-user certificates and border controls. As was recognised at the July meeting, no State alone can prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. Utilising the tools currently at our disposal, and creating new ones will ensure that combined national and collective action will enable the international community to eradicate this deadly trade that has already contributed to so much human tragedy.

Mr. Chairman.

Another issue of overriding concern to the Caribbean region remains the transshipment of nuclear waste through the Caribbean Sea. While recognising the right of states to the peaceful uses of nuclear material, CARICOM countries maintain that these shipments, and the concurrent potential for accidents, represent a serious threat to the economic development of our region. Accordingly, CARICOM States would support the establishment of a comprehensive regulatory framework to promote state responsibility with respect to disclosure, liability and compensation in the event of accidents.

Mr. Chairman,

It is clear that much uncertainty hangs over the current disarmament regime, as we grapple with unresolved issues and seek ways to address new threats, including the potential for weapons of mass destruction to pass from States into the possession of non-State actors, and the proliferation of small arms. Thus, while we engage in discussions concerning the future work of this Committee, CARICOM States also reaffirm that the time has come to take a firm decision to convene the Fourth Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to Disarmament. We have agreed that there are many new threats confronting us, as well as old threats that continue to haunt us, therefore it is time to reaffirm our commitment to existing principles, as well as agree on some new strategies to guide us as we seek to address these threats. CARICOM States are disappointed that we were unable to reach consensus this year on the objectives and agenda of the Session; however, we welcome the opportunity to continue our discussions on this matter in a frank and constructive fashion.

Mr. Chairman,

While there is ample reason to be discouraged, it is unacceptable and indeed impossible for the international community to turn its back on certain disarmament issues. The previous decade was marked by increased commitments, by all Member States, for social and economic development. Yet, as we all know, there can be no development without security and no security without development. We must therefore redouble our efforts in implementing both sides of this equation, or else we will have failed to live up to the obligations contained in the UN Charter.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.