



*The*  
***Bahamas***

**OPEN ENDED WORKING GROUP TO NEGOTIATE AN  
INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENT TO ENABLE STATES TO  
IDENTIFY AND TRACE, IN A TIMELY AND RELIABLE MANNER,  
ILLICIT SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS**

**FIRST SUBSTANTIVE SESSION**

**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]**

**16 JUNE, 2004**

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Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of thirteen members of the Caribbean Community [CARICOM] that are members of the United Nations, namely Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, 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, the first substantive session of the open-ended working group to negotiate an international instrument to enable states to identify and trace, in a timely and reliable manner, illicit small arms and light weapons. We are confident that you will guide our work to a successful conclusion, and pledge our full support and cooperation in this regard.

CARICOM States express their appreciation to you, Mr. Chairman, for the non-paper prepared to facilitate our discussions during this session. We feel that the non-paper will serve as a useful contribution to this debate, having identified some of the constraints, challenges and gaps in existing policy and implementation that will shape the deliberations of the international community on this critical issue.

Mr. Chairman,

CARICOM States have consistently voiced their grave concern at the growing threat posed by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and have welcomed the fact that the international community has, in recent years, begun to take the necessary steps to confront this menace.

In this context, 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 an abiding reality of our subregion that the uncontrolled spread and use of small arms and light weapons poses a dangerous threat to the national security, and the economic and social development of many of our small countries. As stated by CARICOM delegations at the 2001 Conference 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, in our societies.

Faced with this multi-faceted threat, CARICOM States have welcomed the degrees of cooperation undertaken thus far 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 2003, 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, as well as to facilitate the reliable and harmonised marking and tracing of small arms and light weapons. We also continue to call on producer States to exercise greater levels of scrutiny of end-user certificates and border controls. As was recognised at the July 2003 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,

It is in the context of this framework that CARICOM States strongly supported resolution 58/241 which created this working group and pushed this process one step forward. CARICOM States do not produce small arms and light weapons, nor are we major importers of this category of weapons. Indeed, in many of our countries, strict controls are in place on the import and use of these weapons by both law enforcement and private citizens. Yet, despite our best efforts, we continue to face the spread of illicit weapons throughout our territories, most times through the illegal diversion of weapons from the licit trade, and the concomitant rise in violent crime. Accordingly, CARICOM States consider that an effective, multilateral, legally binding international instrument on identifying and tracing illicit small arms and light weapons would be an important contribution to our existing national, bilateral and regional efforts to control a phenomenon that taxes our human and financial resources so heavily. CARICOM States are aware that questions of the nature and the scope of the proposed instrument remain to be considered by this working group, and are ready to engage constructively with other delegations as we tackle this issue.

Mr. Chairman,

While recognising that the working group will engage in more detailed discussions as our work progresses on each of the main areas identified for consideration, CARICOM States wish to offer a few general observations on the issues at hand. With respect to marking, we recognise that this is a key element of the process, and share the views of the Group of Governmental Experts that weapons should be marked with a unique, readily identifiable marking, preferably

at the time of manufacture. Where marking is not possible at the time of manufacture, CARICOM States would stress the need for assistance to be provided to those States that would need to mark weapons at the time of import, and which do not possess the capacity so to do. We recognise many of the legitimate concerns expressed by states regarding issues of national security, and again express our intention to engage constructively as we seek to design an instrument that would prove effective in combating illicit small arms and light weapons, while ensuring security for all States.

With respect to the issue of record keeping, CARICOM States share the view of the Group of Governmental Experts that both the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition and the 2001 Programme of Action contain useful provisions regarding record keeping, which may be used as a point of departure for our discussions in this group. In this regard, CARICOM States would stress the need for records to be comprehensive, and would emphasise the importance of international cooperation in using these records for the purposes of tracing illicit weapons.

CARICOM States note that the Group of Governmental Experts agreed that tracing should remain a national prerogative, however, CARICOM States also accord great importance to international cooperation throughout this process. CARICOM States are pleased with the relative levels of success that have been achieved thus far in tracing small arms and light weapons, through cooperation initiatives at the bilateral, regional and hemispheric levels, and once again take the view that a global agreement on marking and tracing, with robust provisions for international cooperation, would serve to bolster effectively these efforts.

Mr. Chairman,

It is our collective recognition of the threat of global proportions that is posed by the continuing uncontrolled spread of illicit small arms and light weapons that has brought us to this point. Let us now translate that recognition into collective will, and engage constructively with one another as we seek to marry the concerns of national security with global needs. For our part, CARICOM States are fully committed to this process, and look forward to making real progress in our collective deliberations over the next several days.

Thank you