



The
Bahamas

**STATEMENT
BY THE**

**HON. FRANK H. WATSON
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER**

AND

MINISTER OF NATIONAL SECURITY

OF

THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS

AT THE

**UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE
ILLICIT TRADE IN SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT
WEAPONS IN ALL ITS ASPECTS**

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Mr. President, at the outset, my delegation wishes to extend its congratulations to you on your election as President of this important Conference. We are confident that you will guide us through fruitful and productive discussions to a useful conclusion. I wish to add my voice and indeed the voice of the Government and People of The Commonwealth of The Bahamas in full support and commendation for your timely discussion of this critical global subject, "The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects".

Overview

Mr. President, sovereign states on every continent are challenged by the problems that attend the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. We have, therefore, come to these halls of peace in search of solutions to these problems, whose resolution will serve to promote an atmosphere of security and peace throughout the world.

Hemispheric And Regional Overview

The Commonwealth of The Bahamas is an archipelago of some 700 islands and cays, which stretch over one hundred thousand square miles of sea. It has been blessed by a geographical position in the Atlantic basin that puts it in favourable trading proximity to four continents. This proximity gives rise, in present times, to a flourishing tourism industry and a successful financial services industry.

This favourable geographical position also served in times past, to inflict the scourge of piracy on The Bahamas, just as today, in modern times, The Bahamas finds itself in the pathway between drug producing countries of the South, and the drug consuming countries in the Northern hemisphere. So, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the problems of trans-national crime are with us, aided and intensified by modern technology.

The Bahamas shares the general Caribbean experience, where the trade in illicit firearms is a component of the trade in illicit narcotics. I believe it is true to say that all Caribbean states are looking expectantly to this conference for decisive action, which will positively impact these problems.

Role Of The United Nations And Other International Bodies

Mr. President, we live in a time when we are fortunate to have international bodies such as the Organization of American States and the United Nations which assist nation states to co-exist in this global village, guided by internationally accepted practices. With this fact as a background, we have come to this Conference with optimism and anticipation. The air of optimism and anticipation we feel now is identical to that which we felt over the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the United Nations Department of

Disarmament Affairs (UNDDA) and the Organization of American States (OAS), which took place on 26 January of this year.

Indeed, accession to this Memorandum of Understanding, has enhanced international institutional collaboration between the United Nations Regional Center for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Inter-American Drug Abuse Commission (CICAD), which two bodies will become the implementing institutions of this agreement.

The Bahamas has taken note of the report of the United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice of 1997, and the subsequent United Nations Security Council resolution 1209 of 1998, which calls on all countries to introduce regulations to ensure licensing, safe storage and tracing of firearms.

Mr. President, it is the hope of The Bahamas, that from our deliberations during this Conference, resolute action will be taken to greatly reduce the proliferation of small arms and light weapons throughout the Caribbean region, including The Bahamas. Towards this end:

- 1 The Bahamas urges the establishment of mechanisms to trace the manufacturing and registration of weapons through identification markings at the point of manufacture, and through effective registration and licensing systems for the acquisition of small arms and weapons;
2. The Bahamas supports the call for the strengthening of controls of weapons at the points of origin by the implementation of effective export regimes by manufacturing and exporting states;
3. The Bahamas fully endorses the establishment of protocols by states, where they do not already exist, particularly those states that manufacture and export small arms and weapons, to cause the exchange of information and intelligence on producers, dealers, importers and exporters along with the routes and techniques used in the trafficking of illicit small arms and weapons of destruction;

Lastly,

4. The Bahamas lends its support to, and has therefore ratified, the Inter-American Convention, which seeks to facilitate the exchange of experience and training in matters relative to small arms and light weapons, and desires to become the beneficiary of established programmes from states that have effective programmes and strategies.

Mr. President, The Bahamas participated in the regional preparatory meeting of the Latin American and Caribbean states for this conference, held in Brasilia from the 22-24 November 2000. We support the position encapsulated in the Brasilia

Declaration, and call particular attention to the conclusion reached on the importance of a common approach, and it is our hope that this approach will be adopted by this Conference.

In addition, The Bahamas wishes to emphasise the following position of the representatives at our region's preparatory meeting, which recalled that "the illicit trade in small arms in the region is mainly related to drug trafficking, national and trans-national organized crime and other related criminal activities. Crime prevention must thus be an integral part of the approach to combating the illicit trade in small arms."

Mr. President, as I said earlier, The Bahamas has been able to develop successful tourism and financial services industries, aided mainly by its favourable geographical position. These industries require a stable and peaceful society to exist and progress. The de-stabilizing forces of illicit trading in narcotics and firearms therefore cannot be tolerated.

The Commonwealth of The Bahamas is not a nation that manufactures firearms. Our firearms laws can be considered as ultra-conservative, because the citizenry can only obtain firearms licenses, if they are of a type to be used exclusively for hunting. Handguns and automatic weapons are restricted to law enforcement, and the policies governing their use are very strict.

In The Bahamas, we have been able to trace, conclusively, the sources of the illicit trafficking of firearms into our territory. This illicit trafficking challenges our law enforcement officers daily. No doubt you will appreciate that violent crimes engender fear and apprehension, and detract from the quality of life of our citizens. Despite the success of our security forces and their initiatives with other regional partners within the United States of America and throughout the Caribbean, the challenge still remains a formidable one.

Firearms seizures by police continue to increase, yet we are most disturbed by the percentage of recorded crimes in which firearms were the weapons of choice. Over a three (3) year period between January 1, 1998 and December 31, 2000, firearms were used in 57% of the murders, 65% of the attempted murders and 80% of the armed robbery matters.

Although our concern is with the illicit trans-shipment of all small arms, the prevalence of handguns and the emergence of assault weapons within our communities concern us most. As a consequence, we have introduced local initiatives against persons involved in the illicit firearms trade. These include:

- The establishment of a firearms court;
- Improved amendments to the firearms laws, which include more severe prison sentences for firearms convictions;
- The formation of a firearm squad within the police force;

- Increased training for police in methods to detect firearms traffickers;
- The forging of partnerships between local and regional law enforcement agencies, particularly with those to the immediate North of The Bahamas; the point of origin for most of the firearms entering The Bahamas.

Changes to laws governing the banking sector within The Bahamas

Mr. President, it is a well known fact that traffickers in illicit goods and services, whether they be guns, drugs or human beings, seek to finance their illegal enterprises and launder their ill-gotten money through legitimate financial institutions. The Bahamas is neither unmindful of, nor immune to, these threats and accordingly, has recently taken legislative measures, in accordance with international best practices, to effectively strengthen the supervisory and regulatory regime of its financial services sector. These newly implemented measures now exceed those in place in many of the developed countries. It is clear that the best results for guarding against financial services sectors being used to further criminal ends, will not be obtained, until all are adhering to the same financial rules. Until this happens, all of the efforts to prevent corruption and abuse of financial services sectors will be defeated.

Steps The Bahamas to take to ensure compliance with United Nations and O.A.S. bodies on small arms and light weapons

Mr. President, the reduction and eventual eradication of the illicit trade in small arms is in The Bahamas' national interest. It also accords with our well-enunciated position of support for those efforts that are designed to engender world peace. The Bahamas is, therefore, fully committed to working with the United Nations and the Organization of American States, to formulate sustainable policies to successfully combat and eradicate the illegal trade in firearms and light weapons. The Bahamas is also committed to taking definitive action, in accordance with such policies, that will bring about the eradication of this trade at the national level, and by that incremental action, contribute to its eradication globally.

Conclusion

Mr. President, the Commonwealth of The Bahamas remains, finally, equally committed to being a partner in the global fight against the proliferation of illicit arms and weapons. To this end I wish to give every assurance of The Bahamas' active participation in such matters at the regional, hemispheric and global levels.

I am indeed grateful to have had the opportunity to present The Bahamas' position on this important subject.

thank you.