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Chairman of Pacific Islands Forum

Australia
Fiji
Kiribati
Federated States of Micronesia
Marshall Islands
Nauru
New Zealand

Pacific Islands Forum Group

Palau
Papua New Guinea
Samoa
Solomon Islands
Tonga
Tuvalu
Vanuatu



Pacific Islands Forum

United Nations Member States

**STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. AMRAIYA NAIDU,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF FIJI TO THE UNITED NATIONS
AND CHAIRMAN OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM GROUP
TO THE THEMATIC DISCUSSION OF THE FIRST COMMITTEE ON
CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS: SMALL ARMS
16 OCTOBER 2002, UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK**

Mr. Chairman,

As Chairman of the Pacific Islands Forum Group, I have asked for the floor today to make a statement on behalf of Australia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and my own country, Fiji.

The tragic events of 11 September 2001 cast a pall over the work of the First Committee at UNGA 56. One year later, the terrorist threat remains ever-present, as demonstrated by the recent tragic events in Bali. The Pacific Islands Forum group extends its deepest condolences to the Government and people of Indonesia, and to all countries that lost people in the Bali tragedy, in particular, the group wishes to convey its most profound sympathies to the Government and people of Australia in their hour of grief with the loss of so many lives.

Preventing terrorist groups from gaining access to weapons, including small arms and light weapons, is a fundamental security challenge. More effective control over the spread and availability of small arms will help bring safety and prosperity to the lives of innocent and vulnerable people and to prevent terrorist groups from inflicting indiscriminate carnage.

The illicit trade in small arms has a destabilising impact on security in the Pacific Islands region. In our region, the possession in the wrong hands of even a handful of unsophisticated weapons or ammunition can result in civilians and communities being threatened, and can affect the viability of democratically-elected Governments. The importance of a safe and secure environment is crucial to the sustainable development of regional economies on a long-term basis. Pacific Island countries are committed to putting in place effective controls, including national legislation and effective stockpile management procedures, to prevent illicit small arms flows. In this regard, the Pacific Islands Forum adopted the Nasonini Declaration in August 2002 to address regional security and governance challenges. This declaration is contained in UN document A/57/331. In addition, the Forum is

finalising draft model legislation for a common approach to weapons control in the Pacific Islands region. This will serve as the basis for the implementation and enforcement of effective national legislation in our region, where it does not already exist.

It is over one year since Member States agreed by consensus to the adoption of the UN Program of Action on combating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. The Program of Action provides a comprehensive and dynamic framework for Member States to follow in combating the illicit small arms trade at the national, regional and international levels. The international community must now focus on ensuring full and effective implementation of the Program of Action – an outcome to which the Pacific Islands Forum countries are strongly committed and have already taken significant steps towards. In this respect, the Pacific Islands Forum group welcomes again the tabling of the resolution ‘The Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects’, which gives essential backing to the implementation of the Program of Action.

We are pleased also that Japan will host in 2003 a small arms workshop for Pacific Islands countries. Japan and Australia are coordinating closely to ensure that this workshop brings practical, tangible security and governance benefits to the Pacific Islands region. Japan’s workshop will build on the workshop hosted by Australia in 2001, which focused on the development of national legislation and the implementation of effective procedures to safeguard small arms stockpiles in regional countries.

The United Nations will continue to play a key role in overseeing the implementation of the Program of Action and in ensuring its recommendations are carried out in the field. An example of the UN’s welcome pro-activity in this area was the recent assessment mission to Papua New Guinea, led by the Department for Disarmament Affairs, which identified some practical steps to advance weapons disposal and to consolidate the peace process in Bougainville. Similarly, the Secretary-General’s report on small arms represents a timely contribution to international efforts to combat the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, usefully identifying ways in which the Security Council can help to control and eradicate the illicit small arms trade. As the report identifies, in two areas in particular – inclusion of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration activities in peace-keeping mandates, and rigid enforcement of UN arms embargoes – the Council can make a practical and positive impact on international efforts to combat the illicit small arms trade.

In the lead-up to the biennial meeting on small arms in mid-2003, the Pacific Islands Forum countries urge Member States to renew their efforts to implement the UN Program of Action. We must maintain a strong collective resolve to address effectively the governance, humanitarian and security dimensions of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.