UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
FIFTY-EIGHTH SESSION

FIRST COMMITTEE

THEMATIC DISCUSSION ON CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS:
SMALL ARMS IN THE PACIFIC REGION

STATEMENT BY THE NEW ZEALAND REPRESENTATIVE
H.E. MR TIM CAUGHLEY
AMBASSADOR FOR DISARMAMENT

ON BEHALF OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM GROUP

WEDNESDAY 22 OCTOBER 2003

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY
Mr Chairman

In New Zealand’s capacity as Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum, I have the honour to address this Committee on behalf of Pacific Islands Forum members represented at the United Nations: Australia, Fiji, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and my own country, New Zealand.

The Pacific region, despite its mostly peaceful history, is not immune to the security challenges of the 21st century.

Pacific Island countries recognise the effectiveness of working collaboratively to address global and regional security challenges. At the 2001 Pacific Islands Forum Meeting, members agreed to the Biketawa Declaration, which provides an overarching mechanism for Forum Countries to discuss and address regional security issues in a cooperative, consultative manner.

In the past year, the Pacific Islands Forum has tackled head-on the challenges posed by international terrorism and the spread and misuse of small arms and light weapons in the region.

Pacific Island countries developed a regional framework - the Nasonini Declaration - to address the problem of global terrorism. In August this year, PiF leaders endorsed the speedy passage of model legislation to advance counter-terrorism under this process.

Similarly, Pacific Island countries have adopted a regional approach to combating the spread of small arms. Recent studies have outlined the significant social and economic costs of the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons in small Pacific Island communities. These studies have identified disparities in controls and penalties, and permissive attitudes to small arms ownership and management, which create loopholes that were exploited by arms traffickers to gain access to the region. While we have achieved progress in some areas, improving national legislation and regional coordination in customs controls, law enforcement and armory management, will be essential to combat unscrupulous arms traders and other opportunists.

Mr Chairman

Effective implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action to Combat the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects is a key priority for the Pacific region. We have implemented the Programme of Action in many ways:
By developing a common regional approach to weapon control, reflected in a document called the Nadi Framework.

Holding a regional workshop, co-hosted by Japan and Australia in Tokyo in January 2003, to enhance cooperation in legal and institutional areas, law enforcement, and effective stockpile management.

Participating actively in the regional segment of the first Biennial Meeting of the Programme of Action in New York in July.

Pacific Islands Forum Leaders’ endorsement this year of model Weapons Control Legislation, based on the Nadi Framework. Leaders encouraged Forum members to adopt the model weapons control legislation to the fullest extent possible taking account of the different domestic situations.

The region has an ongoing commitment to addressing the small arms threat. To solidify the progress made at two earlier workshops, the Governments of Australia, Japan and New Zealand and the UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific are currently considering a proposal to hold a further regional meeting to promote implementation of the draft Weapons Control Bill. Forum members wish to thank the Japanese Government for its generous, ongoing support for the region’s efforts to tackle the small arms challenge.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the police and military support Pacific Island countries have extended to the Solomon Islands, at the invitation of its Government and consistent with the principles of collective security, to overcome instability and lawlessness caused in part by the spread of small arms. This effort has seen the return of over 75% of the high-powered military weapons removed earlier from the Royal Solomon Islands Police armoury.

The past decade has presented Pacific Islands Forum members with security threats not seen before. Our history of friendly relations gives us an advantage. PIF members will continue to address the security challenges through shared commitment and pragmatic, solutions-oriented approaches.

Thank you, Mr Chairman