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STATEMENT

by

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On the Issue of Conventional Weapons

at the

Sixty-fourth session of the United Nations General Assembly's First Committee

United Nations Headquarters
New York
October 12, 2009
Mr. Chairman

My delegation congratulates you and your election to the Chair of this Committee. You and other members of the Bureau may rest assured of our fullest cooperation as the Committee seeks to finalize the work allocated to it for this session. Trinidad and Tobago also wishes to align itself with the statements delivered by the representative of Haiti on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

Mr. Chairman

The maintenance of international peace and security is inextricably linked to the question of disarmament and the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons which pose grave harm to the well-being of members of the international community. Consequently, we are heartened by the recent commitment of the world's two leading nuclear powers to work towards the conclusion of a new bilateral nuclear arms reduction agreement by the end of this year. We sincerely hope that this development would serve as a catalyst to all nuclear weapon owning states to work towards the reduction and eventual elimination of all nuclear weapons.

Mr. Chairman

All States have a responsibility to ensure that we live in a world that is free from nuclear weapons. It is this conviction which led Trinidad and Tobago to become State Party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and other international treaties aimed at the institution of effective safeguards against proliferation, as well as the destruction of certain types of weapons. Only recently, on November 8, Trinidad and Tobago joined the 182 States which have signed the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and is expected to ratify the treaty in the near future. The signing of the CTBT we view as not only another step in promoting disarmament, but also as providing an opportunity for us to profit from the civilian benefits provided under the instrument in areas such as seismography.

As a producer of petrochemicals, Trinidad and Tobago is cognizant of the potential for abuse of these products and is committed to the peaceful uses of chemistry and therefore became a State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) several years ago. In this regard, we continue to implement our obligations under that convention, and have had our petrochemical production facilities inspected on several occasions by teams from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). Additionally, we also meet our other obligations by making annual declarations pursuant to Article X, paragraph 4 of the verification regime of the CWC, and are in the process of finalizing implementing legislation to give effect to that
convention. Similarly, work is being done on legislation to give domestic legal effect to the provisions of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction.

Mr. Chairman

Trinidad and Tobago is convinced that all actions aimed at disarmament must be tackled primarily through multilateral initiatives, with the United Nations at the fore. We are however deeply concerned about the reticence of some Member States to address other priority issues on the disarmament agenda. We refer here specifically to the challenges posed by small arms and light weapons. For Trinidad and Tobago and other CARICOM States, this category of conventional weapons represent a clear and present danger to the well-being of the citizenry of our region. The illegal trade in small arms and light weapons in the case of the Caribbean has contributed significantly to an increase in criminal activity with the illegal trade and narcotics a core aspect of this activity. For some Member States of the United Nations, the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons is linked to terrorism and armed conflict.

Mr. Chairman, it is widely acknowledged that the illegal arms trade is cross-border in character and therefore requires multilateral action to stem its proliferation. In this regard, we echo the words of the Honourable Patrick Manning, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, who in his recent address to the General Assembly, called for all those States which have not been supportive of the conclusion of legally-binding Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) to join the fold. These include large States which are major manufacturers and exporters of small arms and light weapons, and which have a moral responsibility to assist us in this struggle.

An Arms Trade Treaty which provides for globally acceptable standards for areas governing the import, export and transfer of conventional weapons, is the only viable option to address an issue which threatens the peace and security of many states, especially Small Island Developing States, such as Trinidad and Tobago. Small and vulnerable States like Trinidad and Tobago have joined others in the negotiation and adoption of treaties on disarmament which have no immediate impact on us, and we now request the support of those other states in addressing the issue of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Action on a strong Arms Trade Treaty must not be relegated to a mere footnote in our continued deliberations on disarmament.

Mr. Chairman, Trinidad and Tobago also looks forward to next year’s Biennial Meeting on the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its aspects, which for us provides an enabling environment to discuss issues relating to the transfer of technology and the sharing of best practices in order to address this scourge.
Mr. Chairman.

We also look forward to the work of the Conference on Disarmament to be convened in early 2010, which we expect would provide an opportunity, in a spirit of compromise and transparency to agree on the implementation of all elements on its agenda. Should this be achieved, the Conference would contribute in no small measure to alleviating some of the most troubling issues which impact on international peace and security.

Thank you.