CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM) STATEMENT ON THE
"ARMS TRADE TREATY"

Mr. Chairman

The Committee is just into the third week of its life and you and your Bureau are already justifying the reasons which moved Member States to place you in the management positions which you occupy.

The CARICOM Secretariat, which I represent here as the Permanent Observer is not, of course, a state; it is not a producer or exporter of goods; it does not have a territory or a population. Our weapons are of the non-conventional, non-lethal variety - our words, our ideas, our service. Through these means we perform a number of critical functions vis-à-vis the Community of Caribbean states, including in the areas of Human and Social Development and Regional Trade and Economic Integration among the fourteen member states of the Community.

Inevitably, whether under the one rubric or the other, what affects the Governments naturally affects the Secretariat, and it is the Secretariat’s business. The record levels of crime and violence in our societies, the insecurity, the economic and social dislocation, the interruption of the development effort, are all caused by loopholes in the trade in small arms and light weapons, the transnational organized crime, which this activity brings in its wake, the illegal drug-trafficking, all of which impose enormous burdens on our law enforcement and judicial services. To the extent that they are challenges for the Governments of the region, these are also challenges for the Secretariat, for they severely hamper and undermine our efforts for the promotion of economic and social development and integration.

This is why I thank you for giving me the floor at this closing stage of the consideration of the present cluster of items to say a few words specifically on the Arms Trade Treaty on behalf of the CARICOM Secretariat, which I have the honor to represent here as Permanent Observer.

We were glad when we heard the idea of an Arms Trade Treaty raised. We did not see it as a disarmament measure. We did not see it as signifying the end of the scourge of illegal weapons in our region. But we considered that any instrument which sought by plugging loopholes in the legal trade of weapons to prevent them finding their way to the illicit market is a good place to start. We believed, and still do believe, in its potential value as an instrument that would have the effect of closing the loopholes through which weapons slip from the legal trade into the illicit market and cause the ugly consequences in which we live on a daily basis.
The Secretariat recalls well the skepticism with which the idea was first received in this Committee, then in the OEWG, and even in the early days of the First Prep Com. But little by little we began to see the ability of patient, sustained dialogue to lessen doubts, to improve understanding and to promote confidence. Between October 4th and yesterday my delegation has made a compilation of extracts of more than three score statements noting the expanded acceptance, which the idea of an Arms Trade Treaty has come to enjoy. It would be ungracious of me to select one or two of these statements for quotation. Nor shall I reaffirm what these speakers have so pleasingly affirmed where the potential value of an ATT is concerned, because I do believe that the case for such an instrument is abundantly made. I shall merely thank them sincerely for their affirmations and express the hope that those delegations which still hesitate at the gates would, before long, start approaching the door with confidence and with positive expectation. This slow but steady acceptance of the idea of an Arms Trade Treaty to which I referred cannot be separated, either from Amb. Garcia Moritan’s personal brand of diplomacy and his ability to inspire and to persuade, or from the diligence and resourcefulness of the Office of Disarmament Affairs and the regional centers for disarmament. To the Ambassador and to these entities, I pay well-deserved tributes.

As we in the CARICOM Secretariat see it, like the states which we serve, we need some kind of binding, globally agreed mechanism for plugging loopholes in the legal trade in arms. We will continue to believe that it is possible to devise such an instrument; we believe that enough states desire it, we believe that it is achievable, and we will continue to work in a manner that is consistent with those beliefs, in order to ensure that we have an instrument that will make the different that we need. And when we turn away from New York, it will be to prepare for the next Prep Com. Our Ministers took a decision here in New York on September 25th that our states will hold a Preparatory meeting in January to prepare for the next Prep Com and we are working toward that with deliberateness. We are engaging technical experts from the various subject Ministries as well as policy-makers from the various capitals of the region, personnel from the Missions in New York, NGO’s, the media, and women, so that when we come to the next Prep Com we will have a good understanding of what an ATT means, how it will work, what we want out of it, how we think it should be structured, how we will deal with its implementation challenges and other related aspects. We do not expect that CARICOM will be setting the pace of the next Prep Com, or determining the content or structure of the eventual ATT – far from it. But on the other hand, if there will be any force making for a slackening of the momentum toward agreement on an ATT, it will certainly not be from CARICOM states. You can count on us for that, Mr. Chairman. Likewise, if there are forces seeking encouragement to move forward with all deliberate speed to start negotiating the ATT, they, too, can count on us.