STATEMENT

By

H.E. Ambassador Eden Charles
Deputy Permanent Representative,
of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
to the United Nations
on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM)

In the First Committee

On

Cluster 4: Conventional Weapons -
Towards an Arms Trade Treaty:
Establishing Common International Standards for
The Import, Export and Transfer of Conventional Arms

United Nations Headquarters
October 23, 2012
Mr. Chairman,

The conclusion of a robust and legally binding Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) is an important foreign policy objective for the Member States of the Caribbean Community ("CARICOM").

CARICOM remains strongly convinced that the adoption of a treaty establishing commonly agreed international standards to regulate the trade in conventional weapons, including small arms and light weapons and their ammunition, would prevent their diversion to the illicit market and assist in addressing the myriad problems associated with that trade. As we have said throughout the history of the ATT process, the illegal arms trade is linked to other trans-boundary crimes such as the illegal narcotics trade and organized crime.

Even before the adoption of General Assembly Resolution 61/189 in 2006, we maintained that the lack of common standards to regulate the global arms trade was having adverse effects on the social and economic well-being of the countries of our region. The situation today is no different. In fact, it has worsened.

Our adherence to very useful initiatives, such as the United Nations Register of Conventional Weapons and the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects ("the POA") has not alleviated the negative effects of the illegal trade in small arms and light weapons, due to the non-binding character of these mechanisms which are limited in scope, and which are not implemented effectively by all States.

CARICOM, as part of the group of like-minded States lamented the failure of the Diplomatic Conference held last July to agree on the text of an ATT. We were eager to support the text of a binding instrument which would provide transparency, comparability and accountability in the international arms trade. While the disappointment is still fresh in our minds, the United Nations must seize the opportunity to put the necessary measures in place to reconvene the Conference on the ATT before the end of the first quarter of 2013.

CARICOM, however, submits Mr. Chairman, that next year's Conference must be a continuation of the process and must not be the commencement of new negotiations. We must build on the text annexed to the Report of Ambassador Roberto Garcia Moritan, the President of the July Conference, contained in document A/CONF.217/CRP.1. While CARICOM acknowledges that there are many good elements in the text, it is not without its imperfections.
Nevertheless, the President’s draft treaty provides at least a platform upon which we can make further progress in our quest to conclude an ATT next year.

In 2013, we must aim to adopt an instrument that would require States Parties to conduct a risk assessment of the international transfer of weapons and prevent a transfer if it would exacerbate conflict or be used to commit grave violations of international humanitarian law or human rights law. In this regard, the treaty must clearly define what is a transfer.

CARICOM would also expect a reconvened Conference to amend the draft instrument to include ammunition in its scope and not listed as part of the regime governing exports under Article 6. Ammunition must also be subject to a comprehensive risk assessment as well as record-keeping and reporting requirements as is the case with the other items currently under the scope of the draft treaty.

We also reiterate our call for the ATT to provide for a fewer number of States indicating their consent to be bound by the treaty in order for it to enter into force, as compared to what is now provided in the President’s text.

CARICOM also submits that the rules of procedure of the Conference concerning decision-making must not be used by any State or group of States as a veto which could have the effect of preventing agreement by consensus of a treaty text, which has the support of an overwhelming majority of States. In other words, we must seek to prevent a repetition of what occurred in July.

Mr. Chairman

It is our expectation as well that negotiators at the reconvened Conference would ensure that the ATT would not only establish an Implementation Support Unit (“ISU”), but one that is truly independent and would be tasked with the responsibility to assist States in verifying compliance with the instrument, as well as assist with its overall implementation.

CARICOM is of the view that the future ATT would be the primary instrument regulating the trade in conventional weapons, and as such, should not be subject to other prevailing agreements. A provision safeguarding the primacy of the ATT in relation to other instruments should be expressly provided for in the treaty.

For CARICOM, the issue of international cooperation and assistance is another vital area for the full and effective implementation of the treaty. The ATT should have very strong provisions on this subject.
Mr. Chairman,

We, the Member States of the United Nations, must represent the desire of millions of people who wish to live in societies free from the scourge of armed violence and armed conflict. The losses due to the ills perpetrated by those who use illegal weapons are not only social and economic in nature, but also human and psychological.

The ATT should require States Parties to enact and to enforce effective laws and regulations to control the flow of arms into, out of, and through their respective territories. CARICOM believes that effective implementation of an ATT would help to eradicate the illegal trade in conventional weapons and reduce the incidence of the trans-boundary crimes associated with this activity.

Mr. Chairman,

The Member States of CARICOM held a torch for life in the July 2012 ATT Conference. We would continue to carry this forward to the proposed 2013 Conference, with a renewed sense of cooperation and a spirit of compromise, as we seek to prevent arms transfers that contribute to human suffering.

Thank you.