

SAMOA



STATEMENT BY

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AT THE

**UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE TO REVIEW PROGRESS
MADE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION (PoA) TO PREVENT, COMBAT
AND ERADICATE THE ILLICIT TRADE
IN SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS
IN ALL ITS ASPECTS**

NEW YORK, 30 JUNE 2006

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Thank you Mr. Co-Chair,

There is a perception, rightly or wrongly, that problems associated with the criminal use of small arms and light weapons are confined only to regions and countries in conflict.

This perception, in our case, is partly reinforced by our sense of "islandness" in terms of our isolation; small size, homogeneous population, the absence of a military or armed police force which made us feel immune and shielded from the pain and suffering experienced elsewhere by the illegal use of arms.

True, there were gun-related incidents in Samoa in the past, some fatal, but these were viewed as isolated cases with no direct and clear link to each other, until the upsurge in crime in recent years involving illegal firearms jolted our consciousness and served as a "wake up" call for our people.

Mr. Co-Chair,

Let me now share briefly with you and distinguished delegates some of the initiatives my government has taken to try and bring under control the increase in gun-related crimes.

(1) Amnesty

Part of our government's response was to offer a "firearm amnesty" about five years ago. The result was the surrender and destruction of a large number of unregistered and illegal weapons. The success of this initiative has prompted government to consider offering again another "firearm amnesty" as part of its "Safer Samoa" campaign against the illegal importation of firearms.

(2) Imports of Firearms.

Government moved swiftly and decisively to suspend all imports of firearms and ammunition into Samoa. This embargo continues in force to this day.

(3) Public awareness campaign

The Ministry of Police's public awareness campaign using the media to highlight the consequences of a proliferation of weapons in the country has been largely effective in bringing the issue into people's homes.

(3) Border Control

Strong national border control measures are important to try and restrict the introduction of illegal firearms into the country at the point of entry. But going it alone at the country level can bring only a limited

measure of success. A regional approach with the cooperation of other Pacific countries is the most effective and efficient way of combating this problem. This is the two-pronged approach Samoa has adopted.

For example, national border control measures and local structures have been established by government and these are being complemented and supported by intelligence information gathering and sharing with other Pacific Transnational Crime Units with help from the Pacific TCCC in Fiji. This collaborative joint regional effort has been invaluable for Pacific SIDS given their capacity constraints.

(4) Legislative and Judicial Process.

To win the fight against gun-related crimes calls for an integrated and a "whole-of-government" approach as evidenced by some recent developments in Samoa;

Firstly, Samoa's Parliament this year approved tougher penalties for illegal possession of firearms to act as a deterrent for such offending.

The judicial system responded in kind by imposing imprisonment terms for unlawful possession of firearms to underscore the country's intolerance of such offences which are becoming far too prevalent and putting ordinary people's lives at risk.

At the community level, the village council, church and families continue to play a crucial role in the DDR process, particularly women. As part of the Safer Samoa campaign, the public is invited to cooperate with the police by bringing in unlawful, unregistered and non-operational firearms for destruction.

The next step

National legislations need to be reviewed, updated and strengthened to criminalize violators of the different laws relating to the criminal use of small arms and light weapons and the concurrent penal code made tougher. Samoa's Firearms Licensing system will be one of those to be reviewed soon.

Outside assistance

A few interventions alluded to the need for on-going assistance with capacity strengthening particularly in the areas of legislative drafting, intelligence information gathering, weapons disposal etc. These, coincidentally are also the areas of our greatest needs and we will be grateful if the international community could respond positively.

Mr. Co-Chair

I thank you for the opportunity to highlight some practical steps being undertaken by my government to underscore our commitment to see to it that the human cost of small arms is reduced, if not eliminated altogether.

Thank you.