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Chairman of Pacific Islands Forum

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Pacific Islands Forum
United Nations Member States

Pacific Islands Forum Group

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STATEMENT

BY

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AMBASSADOR/PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

ON BEHALF OF THE
PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM MEMBER COUNTRIES

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

26 JUNE 2006, NEW YORK

Mr President,

You have the full support of the delegations of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) who are Member States of the United Nations and on whose behalf I make this Statement, namely, Australia, Fiji, Kiribati, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and my own country, Papua New Guinea.

Let me begin by quoting Ambassador Pasi Patokallio of Finland when he wrote the Forward to a UN publication under the auspices of the UN Institute for Disarmament Research:

“Small arms fuel violence and intensify human suffering in conflict situations across the globe. The illicit trafficking, proliferation and misuse of small arms have grave impacts on human security, development and human rights. They hamper conflict resolution, peacebuilding and commercial activities in various parts of the world, affecting the lives of millions.”

Mr President,

The members of the PIF welcome this opportunity to participate in this important Review Conference which, we believe, must set a very strong tone for the coming years if we are to effectively deal with this global scourge. Looking back over the last 5 years, countries in our Region have continued to struggle with the uncontrolled flow and misuse of small arms and light weapons, which has had, and continues to have, devastating effects on individuals and in many of our communities, noting here especially our women and children. These devastating effects also have the potential to gravely disrupt our development aspirations including the achievement of the MDGs.

We are well aware that regional level action is crucial to the effective implementation of the Program of Action (PoA). In this regard, we have taken practical steps at the regional level to combat this problem and to create sustainable solutions. We continue to use the PoA as a guide to direct and measure regional action.

Mr President,

In March 2000, the South Pacific Chiefs of Police Conference, recommended the Nadi Framework which established a common approach to weapons control in our Region. The Framework has, in regard to implementing relevant laws, enabled PIF countries to develop a common regional approach to weapons control and focus on the illicit manufacture of, and trafficking in, firearms, ammunition, explosives and other related materials. However, we realise that this remains an area for continued work as we, notwithstanding numerous challenges, continue to address and implement the PoA.

Last week, the PIF Regional Security Committee met in Nadi, Fiji and endorsed a Pacific regional paper on small arms and light weapons to be tabled at this Review Conference. The paper addresses areas of key concern to our Region, including the need for adequate legislation; stockpile management; transfer controls; disarmament, de-mobilisation and re-integration; marking and tracing; demand-side issues; SALW and terrorism; and, reporting.

We are also pleased to report that the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, in collaboration with AusAID, UNDP Pacific Sub Regional Centre, UNIFEM Pacific, the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA), and femLINK Pacific, convened a Regional Workshop on Gender, Conflict, Peace and Security in Nadi from June 15-17 2006, which called for a range of follow-up actions to accelerate implementation of Resolution 1325 in the Pacific region.

Mr President,

Further Regional initiatives have included the ongoing Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) which continues to provide an excellent example of regional cooperation to combat the destabilising results of small arms proliferation. Deployed at the request of Solomon Islands in July 2003, RAMSI partners (Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, and Tonga) helped restore law and order, in large part due to

the collection and destruction of some 3700 weapons and over 300,000 rounds of ammunition. Recent events demonstrate that while we have made considerable progress, there is more to be done.

In the case of Bougainville Province in Papua New Guinea, following a civil war that lasted 16 years, a successful weapons collection and disposal program, monitored by a UN Observer Mission which included Australia, Fiji, New Zealand and Vanuatu resulted in the election and establishment of the Autonomous Government of Bougainville. This month, the Autonomous Government marks its first anniversary.

The operations in both Solomon Islands and Bougainville in Papua New Guinea demonstrate that the need to disarm and demobilise remain critical factors. Over and above these two issues is that of the re-integration of ex-combatants in order to enhance and solidify peace and security in the post-conflict and peacebuilding period. We also see the need for the proper de-mobilisation and re-integration of former military and service personnel into our communities. The need for DDR and security sector reform is addressed in our Pacific regional paper.

PIF countries also continue to pursue efforts at the national level which complement regional work and the PoA. A Gun Summit was held in Papua New Guinea in July 2005 which proposed over 200 recommendations which are now before the PNG cabinet. Weapons free villages have been established in the Solomon Islands along with the outlawing of replica and toy guns as part of the on-going RAMSI operations. In Samoa, an amnesty for gun collection was recently introduced. Other colleagues from our Member States will be highlighting other initiatives during this Review Conference.

Mr President,

Stockpile management and security also remains a strong priority for the region, with the leakage of weapons from official stocks a major source of illicit guns and subsequent criminal activity. Working in partnership with Australia and New Zealand, PIF countries have made real improvements in this area but more needs to be done. While new armouries have been constructed in PNG, Cook Islands, Fiji, Nauru and Samoa, more stringent controls need to be put in place to avoid leakage. Further capacity building and strengthening remain the focus of work in this area.

In addition to management and security of official stocks of SALW, a number of countries in the region have raised serious concerns regarding obsolete but still effective weapons left over from the Second World War. Many of these old weapons have been dismantled and used in homemade SALW. In this regard, we would alert the Review Conference to the need for technical assistance to our countries to clear and destroy these obsolete weapons. Such assistance would also protect our environment from chemical contamination when these weapons rust away and start leaking. Furthermore, a clearing program will also avoid lethal accidents to our people and eradicate dangerous fishing practices from the use of gun powder to make "small fishing bombs".

Mr President,

Our Region remains concerned with the effect, illicit manufacture, trade, use and transfer of SALW have in destabilizing international peace and security. In the case of MANPADS, experience in other regions has shown that non-state actors, including terrorists, can obtain these weapons easily and cheaply. The PoA needs to pay more attention to the question of the availability of illicit SALW, including MANPADS, to non-state actors, including through international cooperation to combat illicit trans-shipment.

Mr President,

We also raise the issue of reporting and note that while some PIF countries have reported under the PoA, not all are able to. A lack of capacity and competing reporting obligations to the UN and other international agencies are contributing factors. However, we do recognize the need to increase the rate of reporting under the PoA and look to UN and UN-related agencies to provide the requisite assistance. Such assistance could also be extended to the further implementation of the Nadi Framework.

While our Region is considered one which enjoys relative peace and stability, our Member States are cognizant of the need to maintain surveillance and monitoring of the transfer of SALW because of their destabilize effects on many of our economies. We need to strengthen our border security in cooperation with our Member States and other Regions, and the need to enhance a more effective legislative framework within each of our Member States are priorities which we need to continue pursuing.

Mr President,

Gender impacts of gun violence have been witnessed in our region during times of conflict and political instability such as in Bougainville-PNG, the Solomon Islands and to a lesser extent Fiji, threatening the human and personal security of women and girl children. This re-emphasizes the importance of involving women and a gender-perspective in all stages of peace building and conflict resolution, and in particular, operationalising UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Attention to gender dimensions of Demobilisation, Demilitarisation and Reintegration (DDR) are particularly vital. Pacific women have played an instrumental role in influencing members of the community to lay down their weapons in times of internal conflict, yet continue to be exposed to gender-based violence, including violence perpetrated with the use of small arms, and domestic violence at the hands of male family members and peers. Even in countries which have not experienced political instability per se, the pervasive nature of violence against women in the Pacific region and general 'silencing' of gender-based violence, means that this violence is likely to be exacerbated should small arms fall into the hands of the wider population.

Mr President,

We also note the recent ***"Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development"*** and hope that the principles enshrined therein will be acknowledged in this Review Conference as we move forward.

Much work has been done, but much remains to reach our goal of eradicating the problem of illicit SALW. The members of the Pacific Island Forum look forward to participating actively in the Review Conference and to setting priorities for the next 5 years.

I close with a quotation from UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan which he made in July 2005 where he said

"We must not relax our efforts to combat this scourge of illicit small arms and light weapons, which continue to kill, maim, and displace scores of thousands of innocent people every year."

Indeed, we endorse those sentiments and look forward to stronger commitments being made by this Review Conference on SALW issues.

Thank you.