



SOLOMON ISLANDS

Statement

by

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Head of Delegation**

**At the High-Level Segment 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**

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Mr. President,

Solomon Islands attaches much importance to this Review Conference and is equally pleased to see a friendly face on the chair as we discuss a global issue that has a violent connotation to it. Small arms in the wrong hands and for the wrong reasons has the capacity and ability to bring about a host of political, economic and social problems on this note, Mr. President, I assure you, of my delegations support and cooperation during this review process.

Before making a few comments in my national capacity, my delegation would like to begin by associating itself with the regional statement delivered by Ambassador Robert Aisi of Papua New Guinea on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum Group of States.

Mr. President,

My delegation notes the Secretary General's opening remarks to this gathering, that this Conference is not about discussing the global banning of small arms and light weapons rather it is about measuring where we stand in terms of implementing the POA . Solomon Islands respects this, however would like to register that at some future Conference, we must examine the causes rather than discussing a process that deals with the symptoms of the problem.

Mr. President,

My delegation agrees with the argument that development and security are both different sides on the same coin. Issues of development, in particular economic development, if not given enough attention, could see countries emerging from conflict, slip back into an insecure and uncertain future. A large portion of Solomon Islands populations are youths. The youthful population remains the strength of Solomon Islands future, however, should the country fail or lag behind in investing and providing opportunities for them, the threat of instability will be like a time bomb, waiting to explode. In this regards Solomon Islands has placed emphasis on rural development in an effort to see a wider and active participation of its population of which 85% resides including youths in the rural areas.

Mr. President,

As you are aware, Solomon Islands went through a period of less than two years of ethnic strife, it was enough to weaken the core foundations of the state institutions that unified the diverse cultures of the country. As conveyed in our Pacific Regional Statement, Solomon Islands is a recipient of an Australian led Regional Assistance Mission comprising of all fellow Pacific Islands Forum SIDS including our close neighbors Australia and New Zealand. The Mission in 2003 collected and destroyed some 3700 weapons, within a period of three months; many of the weapons were homemade given the abundance of ammunitions left during the global conflict sixty years ago.

World War II ammunitions have also been used for fishing by criminal elements, causing destructive damage to the fragile ecosystem in the island state. The Government does have a clean up programme up but continues to need support, recently working jointly within the multilateral Chemical Convention and other partners work on the trend of cleaning up the WWII chemical weapons is being discussed.

Despite the above cited challenges, the commitment of the Government of Solomon Islands in implementing the POA is so much so that it has even banned the selling of toys guns sold in shops including collecting licensed arms for the purposes of rooting out a gun culture from growing in a small country.

Against this dark experience, my delegation pays more attention of examining preventive measures. At international level, Solomon Islands wish to note the valuable role of UNDP in integrating former militants back into the communities, and sincerely believe that the recently established Peace Building Commission should carry out a stock take of all threats occurring in post conflict countries, and provide advisory support where necessary. Solomon Islands further would like to acknowledge the proactive role of United Nation Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) jointly with UNDP to support strengthening governance at provincial level, while discussion is still preliminary, we would like to take this opportunity to call on potential donor community to support such a noble effort.

My delegation is pleased to note that the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands has instituted stability and is working on strengthening the state institutions together with our other partners including Australia, the European Union, Japan, New Zealand and Taiwan.

Policing of illicit arms remains a challenge given the geographical make up of the country, which consists of some 900 islands scattered across 1,800 kilometers sharing borders with a number of countries. At certain points of the common maritime border between countries, it is as close as 15 minutes canoe ride. Assistance to strengthening border surveillance capability and infrastructure is essential in implementing the POA, especially in locations where both are emerging from conflict situations particularly between PNG's North Solomon's Province, Bougainville and Solomon Islands, Western Province. This Conference must also look at addressing strengthening border infrastructure and other measures to assist national efforts in managing its national and international obligations and commitments.

Mr. President,

I would like to close by saying, it is how much we collectively invest in the POA that determines our measure of success. There are countries that have implemented much and there are those especially SIDS and LDCs that need more support, until the balance is made to bridge the gaps between the "can-do-countries" and those requiring special assistance otherwise the challenges of small arms and light weapons will remain on the global agenda.

Thank you