



## **Regional Parliamentary Workshop on “Promoting Engagement of Women Parliamentarians in Addressing the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons”**

26 September 2019,  
Hyatt Regency Hotel, Port of Spain

### **Remarks**

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**Your Excellency Ambassador Biesebroeck,  
Senator Khadijah Ameen of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago,  
Distinguished Parliamentarians,  
Colleagues from the Parliamentarians for Global Action,  
Invited Guests.**

On behalf of the United Nations Country Team, permit me to join the previous speaker in welcoming you to Port of Spain. I also wish to particularly thank the co-organizers; the Parliamentarians for Global Action and the United Nations Trust Facility Supporting Cooperation on Arms Regulation (UNSCAR) for taking the initiative to organize this event - which complement the objectives outlined in the Vision 2030 Agenda for development, articulated through the 17 Sustainable Development Goals – to raise awareness among female parliamentarians in addressing continued prevalence of illicit small arms and light weapons.

This workshop is informed by the need to address the challenge posed to security and development by illicit arms through the enlistment of the capacities and agencies of women in the Parliament. This is a smart move on the part of the organizers, as women have been critical to social change in the Caribbean, through their incredible leadership, networking, and social mobilization capacities. Women are therefore critical to today’s discourse not only as home and nation-builders and leaders, but also as, as revealed through crime reports in countries within the region, because of their roles as perpetrators, armorers, aiders and abettors, and material beneficiaries of arms proliferation.

As development partners, we have seen the devastating impact of illicit arms, and the undue tax it puts on development in this region, with its destabilizing effect on family and social cohesion, cost and ease of doing business, and diversion of promising youngsters into a lifetime of crime. In particular, a 2017 Crime and Victimization Survey Report indicates that the average rate of victimization in this region by assault and threats (6.8%) is higher than in any other region, and that guns are used about twice as often in robbery and three times as often in assaults in the Caribbean as compared with the global average.

The study raised concerns about the tolerance of violence against women and young children in the region, given the fact that early experiences of violence in the home serve as a strong predictor of later perpetration and/or acceptance of violence as a new 'normal' by women. A key risk factor, flowing from the study is the high tolerance level of violence against women and children, which perpetuates cyclical violence and delinquency in society, and which provides a fertile ground for the use of illicit arms by criminal groups. While laudable measures have been taken to address the use of guns in perpetrating violence in the Caribbean region- including through legislation and law enforcement- a critical gap has been insufficient community-level mobilization to say 'no' to illicit arms and light weapons.

This workshop therefore presents an opportunity for us to collectively craft a strategy to support our parliamentarians, as representatives of the people and the only constituency with the deepest roots, which stretches to the local level, to develop and implement practical approaches towards making the fight against arms proliferation to be undergirded by a 'whole of society' approach.

For us at the United Nations, we wish to restate our readiness to not only participate in this workshop, but to also follow-through with the Parliaments in the respective Caribbean countries represented in this meeting, to implement your agreed follow-up programmes, aimed at strengthening parliamentary advocacy, capacity enhancement and any other such measures, capable of increasing the leverage of all of you, as female parliamentarians in promoting the cause of non-proliferation of arms.

As a measure of our commitment to peace, we are currently in the process of developing in the region, together with the European Union (EU), national and local stakeholders, a **Spotlight Initiative**, which is focused on a comprehensive approach to preventing and responding to Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), with specific focus on family violence. From 2020 to 2023, the Spotlight Initiative will disburse Euro4.5 million to assist national stakeholders in Trinidad and Tobago alone, in addressing family violence. tackling this issue. Similar disbursements will also take place in Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Haiti, and Belize. We as the United Nations, are open to exploring means through which female parliamentarians could support community-based initiatives to address the root causes of arms proliferation, as part of the Spotlight initiative.

Whilst wishing you fruitful deliberations, I thank you for the attention.