

Mr Chairman, distinguished delegates,

This year the PoA is ten years old and we do have reason to celebrate. In some states we have seen stronger gun control legislation, more efficient marking and tracing mechanisms, stricter control of stockpiles, and significant disposals of surplus arms and ammunition have resulted amongst other important efforts. Internationally, the PoA has become a more structured process within the UN, has raised awareness of the proliferation of SALW and its nefarious humanitarian effects, and has served as a helpful catalyst to states and civil society alike.

These efforts particularly demonstrate the creative capacity of civil society organizations to identify and respond to the multiple needs of communities affected by gun violence using the PoA framework. Initiatives range from research and advocacy; programming; awareness-raising for leaders; the prevention of gender based violence; disarmament; and public education campaigns on gun control.

Still, there is a lot to reconsider, reassess and strengthen for the PoA to fulfil its potential. When independent experts at the Small Arms Survey ask whether the PoA is “fact or fiction?” it is clear there is much room for improvement. They note “that only 50 to 60 states are taking their UN small arms commitments seriously”. Possibly more worrisome, they state “it is not clear that the UN small arms process has changed much at ‘ground level’ in terms of concrete implementation”.

In the last decade, the world’s problems have changed, as has our understanding of how best to respond. Part of this change is the understanding that violence perpetrated with small arms is no longer concentrated in conflict zones. It occurs mainly in non-conflict situations through common and organized armed crime, interpersonal and armed domestic violence.

Such an increase in gun violence challenges our concept of safety and threatens our communities. In many areas homes and public spaces are now zones of insecurity. Family relations and community cohesion are rapidly fragmenting as a result of the proliferation and misuse of guns.

As the 2011 UNODC Global Study on Homicide highlights, 42% of the world’s 468,000 homicides in 2010 were committed with firearms, a total of almost 200,000 lives lost at gunpoint. In the Americas, 74% of homicides occur with firearms, and the availability of illegal guns is driving rising homicide rates in Central America and the Caribbean - the only sub-regions in the world experiencing such increases.

We have learned from experience over the last decade that there is a significant discrepancy between the PoA framework – both in content and implementation – and what is required to have real impact in communities devastated by gun violence.

So far the PoA process has failed to comprehensively evaluate the implementation of the PoA and how it has contributed, and can contribute most effectively to a reduction on SALW-related violence. Major efforts to rectify this are needed. For one, the political will of the majority of states to honour their PoA commitments must be dramatically increased. As the Small Arms Survey notes, “exceptionally low rates” of reporting on the ITI indicate states are “largely indifferent” to the instrument; they add, “states continued to balk at any form of independent assessment of implementation” and “may have something to hide” as analysis indicates just over 25% have functioning national points of contact in place. For the ITI, only 10% of states have

the required point of contact. I'd like to take this opportunity to remind member states that civil society stands ready to assist states in strengthening their National Focal Points and adding its expertise and experience in efforts to make these bodies work.

To remain relevant and impactful, the PoA must adapt to these new realities. It must evolve. Therefore, we strongly agree with states including Mexico, Germany, Lesotho, Switzerland, and CARICOM member states, among many others, that the PoA must be "strengthened".

With this in mind, the objectives of next year's Review Conference must be clear and achievable building on the outcome of the fourth Biennial Meeting of States and the Open Ended Meeting of Governmental Experts in May this year. We urge states to highlight those aspects of PoA implementation that have a direct impact on levels of SALW-related violence, and work towards the production of a substantive outcome document to be adopted at next year's RevCon that includes essential themes that have been kept out of the process.

These themes include making the ITI legally-binding, developing a legally-binding brokering agreement, including ammunition and explosives in the scope of the PoA, establishing efficient end-user certificate standardisation and verification systems, and addressing gender perspectives, enhanced border controls, and closer partnerships with civil society – in addition to potentially making the PoA itself legally-binding.

For most of these issues, there is strong support from the majority of UN members. As noted by several states, the search for "absolute consensus" – or unanimity – should not block the desire for urgent action from the overwhelming majority.

Indeed, we have seen enthusiastic engagement at the regional and sub-regional level, where a number of agreements on small arms have managed to go further than the PoA. For example, the Nairobi Protocol on small arms commits 11 states in Central and Eastern Africa to do everything in the PoA on a legally-binding basis, plus strictly regulate civilian possession and register and regulate arms brokers.

Countries affected by gun violence are recording obscenely high numbers of homicide victims, mainly young urban men, who otherwise could contribute significantly to the country's economy and improved quality of life for all citizens. A strengthened PoA can be a catalyst for governments to engage in action oriented research and targeted efforts in collaboration with civil society organizations in order to meet their international obligations within this framework, whilst meeting the security and development needs of citizens.

Rather than a process debated every two years or reported upon annually by a minority of states, the PoA must be implemented on a daily basis in every country. All states have signed on to several commitments which, if effectively implemented, can help reduce gun violence worldwide. These commitments must be honoured, and in the spirit in which the PoA was developed, should also inspire a drive to strengthen and update the instrument, enabling it to combat today's gun violence problem and actually deliver the gains sorely needed in affected communities.

I thank you.