Introduction

For CARICOM Members States, the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons (SALWs) and their ammunition continue to cause significant loss of life and human suffering and efforts to address this scourge have resulted in the diversion of scarce resources from other crucial areas of national development. CARICOM Member States therefore, attach particular importance to the effective marking, record keeping and tracing of SALWs which serves to increase the effectiveness of arms control measures within the broader context of armed violence, while contributing to stemming the flow of illicit weapons into the Region.

The UN Programme of Action (PoA) and the International Tracing Instrument (ITI) remain key elements in the Region’s efforts towards effective action in addressing the illicit flow of SALWs and their ammunition at the national, regional and international levels. In keeping with the level of importance with which CARICOM attaches to these instruments, the CARICOM Declaration on SALWs recognizes the UN PoA and the ITI as universal mechanisms that address the illicit proliferation and misuse of
SALWs. The Second Meeting of Governmental Experts therefore, provides the opportunity to not only review progress made in the implementation of the UN PoA and the ITI, but also to explore at a technical level, ways in which Member States may now strengthen implementation at all levels. CARICOM is also of the view that the MGE2 provides an opportunity for regional organizations to share their views and experiences on the implementation of the UN PoA and ITI, particularly in areas of regional/international cooperation and information exchange.

CARICOM considers the control of ammunition to be an integral part of action to address the illicit trade in SALW as well as for the effective implementation of the POA and ITI. CARICOM therefore strongly recommends that the implications of recent developments in technology related to ammunition be discussed within the framework of the MGE2.

CARICOM welcomes the entry into force of the UN Arms Trade Treaty (2013) as an important tool in the fight against the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. CARICOM also welcomes the adoption by the UN Security Council resolution 2117 (2013), the first-ever resolution dedicated exclusively to the issue of small arms and light weapons, as well as the UN Secretary-General’s reports to the Security Council of 22 August 2013 entitled “Small Arms” (S/2013/503) and the General Assembly of 6 May 2014 entitled “Recent developments in small arms and light weapons manufacturing, technology and design and implications for the implementation of the International Tracing Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small arms and Light Weapons (A/CONF.192/BMS5/2014/1).

While technological development continues to contribute to the implementation of the UN PoA and ITI, in reality many States have not benefited and the gap between developed and developing States is
CARICOM wishes to underline the urgency now required in efforts to bridge the existing technological gap between developed and developing States as well as for developed states to increase assistance given to developing countries including support for infrastructure.CARICOM also notes that the absence of relevant infrastructure continues to pose a major hindrance to harnessing the benefits of modern information technology in SALW controls.

A. Implications of Recent Developments in Small Arms and Light Weapon Manufacturing, Technology and Design for Effective Marking, Record Keeping and Tracing

CARICOM notes that new developments in small arms manufacturing, technology and design, including the increasing use of polymer components, the development of modular weapon systems and the production of firearms using additive manufacturing processes (3D printing) have significant implications for marking, record-keeping and tracing and pose a series of challenges to the implementation of existing control instruments, such as the UN PoA and the ITI.

While advances in Technology now create opportunities for enhanced marking, tracing and record-keeping it simultaneously creates a number of challenges to the implementation of existing control instruments such as the UN PoA and the ITI. It also facilitates easier access to SALW’s. The MGE2 provides an opportunity for States to review and take stock not only of this progress but also practical steps necessary to ensure the continued and enhanced effectiveness of national marking and record keeping systems. This of course is in addition to progress being made in the transfer of technology, equipment and capacity building under the UN PoA and ITI. It is also to be seen as assisting in the identification of areas which ought now to be strengthened;
1. CARICOM therefore considers that MGE2 should examine the opportunities and challenges provided by the latest technology advances in the context of marking, record keeping and tracing of SALW’s and ammunition and further elaborate on the recent Report of the Secretary General.

2. CARICOM recognizes that for developing States there are numerous barriers to the uptake of new technology that can improve marking, record keeping and tracing. These include the cost of establishing supporting infrastructure (databases and networked IT) and training. Special attention should be paid to this issue.

3. CARICOM acknowledges that one of the main challenges with modular weapons is that the major components cannot be clearly distinguished for tracing purposes because parts may bear conflicting identifying information (for example serial numbers) since barrel and calibre modularity allows an operator to reconfigure the weapon into different ‘types’ and calibres. The fact is for example, that fully modular rifles with a designation of caliber, makes record keeping and tracing more complicated. CARICOM suggests that solutions will need to take into account the inherent complexity of modular weapons, while encouraging simple and practical solutions.

4. According to ‘paragraph 7’ of the ITI, all marks required are on an exposed surface, conspicuous without technical aids or tools, easily recognizable, readable and durable and, as far as technically possible, recoverable. CARICOM notes the difficulty in marking polymer frames durably as prescribed in ‘paragraph 7’ of the ITI and the difficulty in recovering these markings. This has implications for tracing.
5. Polymer weapons also present additional challenges for import marking given that some metal tags inserted during production are not large enough to accommodate post-manufacture marking. CARICOM urges a focus on import marking of polymer guns. CARICOM also notes the limited number of marking methods (*for example, laser marking*) that can be used to mark polymer and the potential significant cost implications to developing States.

6. CARICOM stresses the challenges posed by 3D printing, including the control of unlicensed production, the limited application of forensics (ballistics) techniques to some 3D printed firearms and the possible routine destruction of low-cost 3D-printed guns by criminals in order to eliminate evidence.

B. Practical Steps to Ensure the Continued and Enhanced Effectiveness of National Marking, Record Keeping and Tracing Systems in the Light of Such Developments, Including Ways to Support the Transfer, Uptake and Effective Utilization of Relevant Tools

1. Marking, Record Keeping and Tracing can take advantage of technological advances. New marking technologies, such as data matrix codes and micro stamping, coupled with improvements to associated scanning technology, could allow users to instantly capture, store, retrieve and exchange information about a given weapon. For developing states however, the adoption of new marking and scanning systems and the existence or creation of necessary IT infrastructure may be cost prohibitive. Greater assistance is needed for developing states, particular in the application of new technologies which will assist in the implementation of SALW norms. Bridging the technology divide instead of widening it should be a shared endeavor.
2. ‘Paragraph 10’ of the ITI provides that states apply the mark ‘to an essential or structural component of the weapon where the component’s destruction would render the weapon permanently inoperable and incapable of reactivation, such as the frame and/or receiver’. Given the high interchangeability and commonality of parts and components that characterize modular weapons, the application of marks to more than the ‘control component’ could lead to confusion and errors in the identification of the weapon.

3. Given the widespread use of polymers in firearms manufacturing, the unavailability of the appropriate marking technology (for example, lasers) and their prohibitive cost could render certain marking norms impossible to fulfill, in particular those governing post-manufacture marking. The physical characteristics of polymers and the difficulty of marking them durably place severe limits on the recoverability of removed or altered marks, which in turn potentially thwarts tracing.

4. CARICOM recommends that greater guidance is needed on issues such as the use of metal tags, marking methods applicable to polymer firearms parts and the depth and placement of such markings.

5. CARICOM supports the further development and use of databases and technologies aimed at compiling and facilitating the exchange of information relating to tracing in general. A key challenge in the Region is the computerization of records, ensuring that each gun can be linked to its last legal user. CARICOM welcomes assistance in the development of data management systems in Member States, in conformity of ‘paragraph 14 and 15’ of the ITI.

6. CARICOM encourages MGE2 to look at ways to enhance the exchange of information between authorities at the national, regional and
international levels related to tracing results as well as other information relevant to marking, record keeping and tracing of SALW, including the further development and full use of databases and online technologies (such as iArms and iTrace) in order to increase the effectiveness of arms control measures and to prevent diversion of SALW.

C. The Transfer of technology and Equipment, as well as Capacity Building, in Particular Training, for the full and Effective Implementation of the Programme of Action (PoA) and the International Tracing Instrument (ITI)

1. A major challenge faced by developing states, including CARICOM in implementing the UN PoA and the ITI is the lack of technological transfer and the sharing of lessons learnt. CARICOM calls for redoubling efforts to address this imbalance which is critical for enhancing SALW controls and reducing the current technological divide between developed and developing states. States with the most advanced technology should help those in need.

2. CARICOM welcomes the transfer of technology, as well as the application of accompanying measures such as capacity building for the involved personnel and maintenance of the transferred equipment. This is a key element in developing a sustainable approach to assistance. Ignoring the importance of technology transfer and the development of sustained in-country expertise could lead to a further widening of the technological divide between developed and developing States and may also lead to a weakening of the implementation of the UNPoA and the ITI.
D. The Critical Importance of International Cooperation and Assistance

- Effective international cooperation and assistance underpins our collective effort for the successful implementation of the UN PoA and the ITI, provides an important platform for States in need of technical, financial and technological assistance and is therefore critical for:

  i. Capacity Building

1. CARICOM is of the view that exchange of knowledge, information, expertise and lessons learnt regarding the development of new technologies such as for the recovery of markings removed or altered from polymer parts should be enhanced at the bilateral (North-South / South-South) and multilateral levels.

2. Regional organizations should be encouraged to continue their leading role in UN PoA and ITI implementation, especially in the area of marking, record Keeping and tracing.

3. States should be encouraged to take advantage of, and benefit from, cooperation with INTERPOL in efforts to ensure the full and effective implementation of the UN PoA and ITI.

4. International cooperation and assistance, including associated training, is important to the broad diffusion and uptake of technology suitable for the marking of polymer firearms, in particular after the time of manufacture.

  ii. Relationship of UN PoA and the ITI commitments to the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)

1. Given their synergetic relationship the ATT is expected to lend strong impetus to the implementation of the UN PoA and the ITI. Care must be taken however, to avoid overlap in work under these instruments.
In this context, CARICOM invites the MGE2 to take into account the role of the ATT in establishing international norms for the control of the legal trade of SALW.

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