

Mr. Chairman

I address this distinguished gathering of parliamentarians and other distinguished representatives at a time when my country, the global community, and the family of Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA) are mourning the passing of, His Excellency, Arthur Napoleon Raymond Robinson who died a few days ago.

Mr. Robinson was not only a committed member of our organization, but is also revered internationally as a statesman who has bequeathed us a rich legacy. This is amply observed through his contribution to the development of Trinidad and Tobago and the CARICOM region, which spanned several decades. Additionally, it is also marked by several initiatives which he championed on the global stage, including the establishment of the international law programme of Parliamentarians for Global Action.

The late President Robinson is also globally acclaimed for his pioneering work which led to the creation of the International Criminal Court. An institution which now stands as a monument in the fight against impunity against those who commit crimes of serious concern to the international community, namely, war crimes; genocide; crimes against humanity; and, the crime of aggression.

His steadfast efforts which paved the way for the establishment of the ICC are testimony that our members, whether they hail from a small State like, Trinidad and Tobago, or a large country, can help to influence major issues which confront the international community.

More recently, this was exemplified in the role played by Trinidad and Tobago in the process which resulted in the negotiation and adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty (“ATT” or “the Treaty”). As Lead Negotiator on behalf of the Caribbean Community on the ATT, Trinidad and Tobago had the full support of its Prime Minister, the Honourable Kamla Persad –Bissessar, who, in her first address to the United Nations General Assembly in September 2010, called on Member States to lend their support for the elaboration of a legally-binding instrument to regulate the trade in conventional arms.

She articulated that the diversion of small arms and light weapons from the legal trade to the illicit market was having a disproportionately negative effect on the Caribbean sub-region, where it is linked to the illegal drug trade, as well as other trans-boundary crimes. Prime Minister Persad-Bissessar lamented that the pernicious illegal arms trade has contributed to an exponential increase in gun-related violence in our societies. At that time, she indicated further that CARICOM Governments had expended tremendous financial, human and other resources in the fight against the illegal arms trade, which could have been used to provide social services for the people and that, small arms and light weapons were “the weapons of mass destruction”, of the region.

The fact that in a relatively short time, Mr. Chairman, Member States of the United Nations agreed to the adoption of the ATT, reinforces my faith in the ability of the General Assembly, as the most representative multilateral body, to discharge its mandate envisioned under the Charter of the UN.

Mr. Chairman

Trinidad and Tobago, represented by the Honourable Winston Dookeran, Minister of Foreign Affairs, signed the ATT at the Special Ceremony held on June 3, 2013 at UN Headquarters, New York; and was among the first States to ratify this ground-breaking Treaty. The Honourable Prime Minister herself deposited the Instrument of Ratification indicating her country's decision to be legally bound by the provisions of this agreement at a ceremony convened at the UN in September last year.

We recognize that the ATT is not simply a mechanism aimed at regulating the trade in conventional arms, including small arms and light weapons and their ammunition. If one were to examine its preamble and its human rights and humanitarian law principles, it would be revealed that the ATT is also an instrument with a significant focus on preventing the loss of lives. Consequently, I applaud the decision of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to provisionally apply, Articles 6 and 7 of the Treaty pending its entry into force for the country.

What this means, is that Trinidad and Tobago has demonstrated that it will take steps to ensure, for example, that it would not authorize any transfer of conventional arms, if it has knowledge at the time of authorization that the arms or items would be used in the commission of genocide, crimes against humanity, or grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 1949. Permit me to say at this juncture, that these particular obligations under the ATT correspond to Trinidad and Tobago's obligations which flow from the Rome Statute of the ICC, where we are required to assist the international community to prevent the occurrence of these heinous international crimes and to bring to justice the perpetrators.

Mr. Chairman

The PGA has a lot to be proud of with the adoption of the ATT. We were among the staunchest advocates for the elaboration of a Treaty which provides for commonly agreed international standards for regulating or improving the regulation of the global arms trade; and, to prevent and eradicate the illicit trade in conventional arms and prevent their diversion.

But is our work in this area completed? The ATT is now at a critical stage in its early life. It would not make a difference in the lives of potential victims of armed conflict and armed violence, or provide some form of justice to those millions of souls who have lost their lives at the hands of warlords, or gang leaders, if it does not enter into force soon and is enacted into national laws.

As of today, 118 States have signed the ATT. 31 have ratified and are thus legally bound by its provisions. However, Article 22 of the Treaty requires the deposit of 50 instruments of ratification before the Treaty enters into force. It now stands that we are in need of another 19 to pass that threshold.

What can we do as PGA, or legislators? Some legal systems provide that the signature or ratification of treaties or other international agreements can only be effected with the approval of the legislature. Consequently, we must continue to use our well-honed skills to bring to the attention of our parliamentary colleagues, whether those on the government side or, those in opposition and develop a bipartisan approach so that the ATT is signed and ratified thereby enabling its early entry into force.

Correspondingly, we must also take the necessary steps after ratification so that the Treaty is enforceable in our jurisdictions through the passage of national laws and regulations consistent with Article 14, and the object and purpose of this landmark instrument. In this regard, let us duplicate the work we did in campaigning for national laws to give effect to the provisions of the Rome Statute of the ICC.

Mr. Chairman

An examination of the negotiating history of the ATT would show that it was done with a tremendous degree of cooperation among States, whether big or small; developed or developing; exporter or importer.

I have also witnessed this level of cooperation in my region, when the Government of Trinidad and Tobago hosted 2 regional workshops to devise a negotiating strategy for CARICOM during the preparatory stages of the ATT process. More recently, in February of this year, we again hosted a seminar geared towards regional experts who are intimately associated with the ratification and full implementation of the Treaty. From all accounts, this exercise was successful and there was an increase in the number of signatories from CARICOM. I have been advised that the number of ratifying States from the region is expected to increase, thereby enhancing CARICOM's contribution to the achievement of the 50 instruments of ratification that are required for the entry into force of the ATT.

The seminar also brought together some experts from other regions, including, Latin America, Africa, and Asia-Pacific; in addition to representatives from intergovernmental organizations and civil society. It also reviewed model legislation with a view to establishing the needs of the region, which although largely made up of States which follow the common law legal system, have in Haiti and Suriname, 2 Members which follow the continental or civil law system.

Mr. Chairman

I respectfully submit that this is the type of cooperation contemplated under Article 15 of the ATT, because it was observed that the level of preparedness to ratify and fully implement the Treaty would vary from country to country, region to region, depending on the availability of resources. As PGA, we must therefore be proud of our efforts in hosting this Workshop, but we must also seek to partner, where possible, with governments and other entities in hosting similar events in the future.

PGA has the requisite skills, resources, credibility and commitment built up over many years to make a significant difference in making the ATT a truly universal instrument. As crusaders, we must continue to reach out to those governments who were not among the 154 States which voted in favour of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution which adopted the Treaty and which have not signed or ratified it.

We must seek their audience with a message which says that the ATT is not inconsistent with their rights to acquire conventional arms, to exercise their right to self-defence and for peacekeeping operations; and to produce, export, import and transfer conventional arms for legitimate purposes in accordance

with the relevant provisions of the Charter of the UN. We must indicate that the Treaty is not a disarmament mechanism, as compared to the Chemical Weapons Convention. And most importantly, we must also demonstrate that failure to embrace the ATT would result in the continued diversion of conventional arms, their parts and components, as well as ammunition, to the illicit trade which has for decades resulted in the death of countless hapless victims, either in civil wars, or on the streets of many capitals due to gang-related violence.

In closing Mr. Chairman, I wish to solicit the support of my fellow colleagues of the PGA for the bid by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to host the Secretariat of the ATT in Port of Spain. The Secretariat is expected to assist States Parties in implementing the provisions of the Treaty and any other issues mandated by future meetings of States Parties.

The international architecture has changed drastically within recent times. New powers have emerged, even within our Latin American and Caribbean region, and have espoused that some of the old ways of conducting international relations must change. This must also be observed in the location of UN - related bodies, including those established by treaties, such as the Secretariat of the ATT. As it now stands, a handful of States monopolize the hosting of international organizations. This contradicts the principle of equitable geographic distribution in the membership of international organs and the location of global bodies which has been adopted by the UN.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago and many like-minded States embrace this principle and have come out in support of the CARICOM endorsed candidature to host the ATT Secretariat in Port of Spain.

I assure you that my country possesses the requisite human, infrastructural and other resources which are necessary to host this important vehicle established to assist States Parties implement their obligations under the ATT in a non-discriminatory manner.

My dear friends, I take this opportunity to request that you impress upon your governments the need to lend their support for Trinidad and Tobago to host Secretariat of the Arms Trade Treaty.

I thank you.