

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HON. FIAME NAOMI MATAAFA
ACTING PRIME MINISTER
TANOA TUSITALA HOTEL, APIA SAMOA
26 APRIL 2018

Rev. Kereta Faatonu
Your Excellency David Nicholson NZ High Commissioner to Samoa
UN Resident Simona Marinescu
Coordinator& UNDP Resident Representative in Samoa
Speaker of the Cook Islands Honorable Niki Rattle
Deputy Speaker from NZ Honorable Adrian Rurawhe
Fellow Parliamentarians
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

Talofa lava and a warm welcome especially to the participants who have travelled near and far to participate in this important workshop.

The presence and accumulation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) legally or illegally in our region is an issue of great concern. In comparison to other regions, it is said that our region suffers minimally from large-scale arms trafficking. However, given our extensive but vulnerable borders, small populations and limited human and financial resources, we continue to face challenges in countering the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons, and in controlling its negative consequences to our people.

Our Pacific Forum Leaders have noted with extreme concern the availability throughout the Pacific of guns and small arms and light weapons, which have been used to fuel and exacerbate violence and conflict and to inflict harm upon the vulnerable, in particular women. It only takes a few small arms and light weapons in the wrong hands, to cause instability. Our own region has witnessed how such arms can support criminal activities, disrupt the peaceful lives of communities and impede development. Therefore, international instruments such as the UN Program of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, if successfully implemented, further contributes to our efforts to ensure the stability, peace, security and protection of human rights in our region.

The rising number of reported cases on the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons in our region indicates the threat is real. The discussions to be held therefore during this two day workshop is timely, and the urgency

for action is crucial. The workshop gives us an opportunity to understand the issue better, share our experiences as Pacific Island countries, and more importantly come up with the key actions we as parliamentarians can take to help realise the main objectives of the UN POA.

For Samoa, we continue to support the promotion of the principles of general disarmament and the non-proliferation of weapons that kill and maim people indiscriminately. We remain committed to partnerships for international peace and security and that is why we are committed to the UN Programme of Action and have also joined a number of Disarmament and Arms Control Treaties such as the Arms Trade Treaty; Convention on Cluster Munitions; Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction; Treaty on the Non Proliferation of nuclear weapons. More recently we ratified the Biological Weapons Convention and signed the historical Treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons. As a small island developing state without a military and with an unarmed police force, our joining these conventions is testimony to our firm commitment that their implementation will contribute significantly to saving lives, stopping human rights abuses, avoiding crises, ensuring the respect for rule of law and can effectively reduce and eventually eliminate altogether, the human cost of conventional arms and weapons of mass destruction.

Samoa has taken key steps in implanting these conventions including complying with the UN Programme of Action. In 2016 we submitted our Compliance Report on the Programme of Action and since that report Parliament has passed the Conventional Arms Act 2017 which is critical to regulating trade in the weapons and our implementation of the UN POA and the Arms Trade Treaty. Addressing the illicit trade of these weapons are also crucial to the local regional and international implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG16 on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies. Sustainable development cannot be realized without peace and security; and peace and security will be at risk without sustainable development.

Pacific Colleagues and friends,

The challenge I put to you for the next two days is not only to look at possible actions to promote compliance with the UN Programme of Action, but also look at how implementing the POA can also contribute to implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and other disarmament and arms control treaties. While identifying what needs to be

done at the national level, it is important during this workshop to look at what can be done more effectively at the regional level.

The Forum Leaders last year in Samoa reiterated the importance of strengthening collective action for regional security and agreed to build on the Biketawa Declaration and other Forum security related declarations to expand the concept of security, inclusive of human security, humanitarian assistance, prioritising environmental security, and regional cooperation in building resilience to disasters and climate change. The leaders also endorsed the Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development.

With many new developments at national regional and international level, your discussions are therefore timely. It will be irresponsible for us as Parliamentarians to ignore this crucial opportunity to address the illicit arms flow within our region given it is a real concern for our populations, it threatens the stability of our region and negatively impacts our sustainable development efforts.

I wish to end by thanking the Parliamentarians for Global Action for making this workshop possible. The timeliness of this gathering cannot be overstated and we applaud your commitment to the issue and grateful for the opportunity provided to our region.

I wish all participants the best in your deliberations, and look forward to the outcomes of this workshop.

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