

**STATEMENT OF AMBASSADOR ALBERT R. RAMDIN,
ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAS
AT THE FIRST MEETING OF NATIONAL AUTHORITIES DIRECTLY RESPONSIBLE
FOR GRANTING THE EXPORT, IMPORT, AND TRANSIT LICENSES OR
AUTHORIZATIONS FOR TRANSFERS OF FIREARMS**

Washington, D.C., U.S.A.

October 6, 2005

Distinguished Ambassador Alvaro Tirado of Columbia and Pro Tempore Chair of the CIFTA Convention,
Distinguished delegates and experts,
Staff of the OAS,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to address this First Meeting of National Authorities Directly Responsible for Granting the Export, Import, and Transit Licenses or Authorizations for Transfers of Firearms, held within the framework of the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials (CIFTA).

The illicit trafficking in firearms and its impact on society ranks among the most disastrous criminal activities against humankind. These horrible and despicable acts resulting in death have neither ideological nor geographic boundaries and can therefore take its toll in any of the countries you represent.

I am particularly pleased with your presence here today as it reflects and confirms your states' determination to tackle this scourge, by joining forces in a multilateral framework. If we are to be successful, this is without any doubt the best approach as we are facing a transnational criminal activity similar in scope to drug trafficking—one that represents a significant source for organized crime, which has no scruples and will stop at nothing to carry it out.

On November 13, 1997, the CIFTA was adopted in the context of the OAS. I must inform you that on that date I had the honor to sign this Convention on behalf of the Republic of Suriname, then in my capacity as Permanent Representative to the OAS.

This Convention, whose groundbreaking nature has been universally recognized, has inspired the adoption of other international instruments on related topics, such as the Protocol to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, known as the Palermo Convention. The CIFTA also served as a valuable model for the United Nations program of action in this regard.

The Convention specifically speaks of the harmful effects of those criminal activities on the security of each state and the region as a whole. It says expressly that said activities endanger the well-being of peoples, their social and economic development, and their right to live in peace.

Statistics demonstrate alarming facts. According to the International Red Cross, light weapons alone have caused four million deaths since 1990, including almost three million women and children. Moreover, according to United Nations figures, the estimated cost of the violence associated with such weapons in terms of personal and material damage is 14 percent of the GDP. Figures from the United Nations show that there are currently about 500 million light weapons in the world, and some calculations indicate that 40 percent of illicit light weapons have been diverted from licit trade.

The OAS is indeed concerned about the increase at the international level of this criminal activity, and points to its links with other criminal activities such as drug trafficking, terrorism, transnational organized crime, and mercenary and other activities, and we believe that urgent attention and action is required to stem this problem.

As an innovative measure, the Convention provides for a forum for cooperation and follow-up--the Consultative Committee, which was established following the deposit of the 10th instrument of ratification. This mechanism has indeed allowed significant progress in the implementation of the Convention during the five and a half years of its existence.

The efforts being made to promote its signing and ratification have resulted in its signature by 33 of the 34 states of the Hemisphere and its ratification by 26. I call on all those member states that have not signed or ratified the CIFTA to do so as soon as possible.

As stipulated in the Convention, a conference of its states party was to be convened five years after its entry into force to examine its functioning and application. In fulfillment of that mandate, the First Conference of the States Party to the CIFTA was held in Bogotá, Colombia, in March 2004, where the Declaration of Bogotá on the Functioning and Application of the CIFTA.

The Declaration of Bogota represents a considerable step forward in achieving the purposes of the CIFTA as it contains concrete commitments by the states party to strengthen cooperation.

We have gathered here to implement those decisions and the mandates from the OAS General Assembly, and I am convinced that your work will be as beneficial as that done by the framers of that Declaration.

What you are expected to accomplish at this meeting falls within the context of the objectives set in the Declaration of Bogotá—objectives that you are already familiar with. Here you are being asked to take a first look at them, which is in no way meant to be an exhaustive analysis of all the factors they involve.

While my remarks are not intended to initiate consideration of these objectives—I know that your professional skills and your direct involvement in the matter make you best suited to do so—I would like to underscore the importance of the first objective since I consider it the starting point for achieving the others.

The first has to do with facilitation of mutual understanding and the start or strengthening of the exchange of information and cooperation between the authorities directly responsible for the area, to ensure effective and efficient compliance with the corresponding provisions of the Convention, and the application, as appropriate, of the CICAD Model Regulations.

Your mere participation in this meeting confirms that in fact we have started to work towards this first. I am convinced that, in the next two days, during which you will be sharing your experiences and concerns in a climate of collegiality, you will forge ties or strengthen existing ties to address common problems.

If, as a result of this meeting, we are able to establish secure and timely channels of communication among you, we will have taken an important first step toward achievement of the other objectives, inasmuch as they are all designed to ensure that activities related to authorizations or licenses are carried out in such a way as to prevent firearms, ammunition, explosives, and related materials from being diverted toward illicit trade. This is not possible without a reliable and dynamic information exchange system.

Another important objective refers to the implementation of a viable, effective, secure, and sustainable network for information exchange for the aforementioned purposes. The OAS General Secretariat has conducted a preliminary study on this matter and will make an introductory presentation on some of the technical resources available in this area.

I call upon you to consider not only these objectives but also all of those before you from a practical point of view so that any information available as a result of this first meeting will be consistent with the reality of the problem and enable it to be tackled effectively.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You have an important task before you as we are grappling with an enormous challenge to our lives and livelihoods. I am pleased to note that the Hemisphere has reached a consensus and is determined to join efforts to address the problem.

While recognizing that no country is exempt from the illegal trade in small fire arms, at the same time we should do our utmost to mitigate and preferably eradicate the efforts of transnational crime to subject our People and Nations to criminal conduct, flooding it with arms and explosives that may serve as instruments of death and destruction.

I wish you much success in your work, and I am certain that, given your interest in participating in this meeting, you will achieve it. Every life in the world or the Hemisphere that is saved as a result of your efforts from a deadly gunshot wound or a cowardly explosion will be your best reward.

Thank you very much.