On behalf of José Miguel Insulza, Secretary General of the Organization of the American States, I am pleased and honored to speak to this esteemed group of authorities on an area of critical importance for preventing and combating illicit firearms trafficking.

Like the Programme of Action, the CIFTA Convention, of which the OAS is custodian, places significant emphasis on the need to mark and trace firearms. Article VI of the CIFTA clearly states the obligations of States Parties to mark firearms and time of manufacture, import and/or those firearms confiscated or forfeited. Article XI calls on States Parties to maintain the information necessary to trace and identify illicitly manufactured or trafficked firearms. The OAS actively promotes implementation of all provisions of the CIFTA Convention, but currently focuses particular attention on encouraging full application of these two specific Articles.

To facilitate this process, the OAS has available Model Legislation on the Marking and Tracing of Firearms, which was approved by CIFTA's Consultative Committee in 2007, and offers countries a suggested framework of policies and practices for firearms marking, record-keeping, tracing and penalization of marking offenses, among others. This model legislation can serve as a valuable tool to any country wishing to strengthen its legislative and/or regulatory regimes in regards to the marking and tracing of firearms.

With regards to concrete technical assistance in this matter, the OAS, through the CIFTA Technical Secretariat, has been implementing a program to help strengthen national capacities to mark firearms, particularly at point of import and/or confiscation.

Through the “Promoting Firearms Marking in Latin America and the Caribbean” initiative, and with generous funding from the Government of the United States, the OAS is providing at least one dot-peen type marking machine to 30 beneficiary countries of the region, together with the necessary training for its use, as well as a laptop computer with specially designed software to facilitate record-keeping.

Over the past year, 25 countries have formally expressed their interest in participating in this program and have designated a national point of contact for this purpose. Of those 25 countries, we are very pleased to report that 7 countries have demonstrated their commitment to increasing their national firearms marking capacity through the framework of this OAS initiative: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Uruguay, Paraguay, The Bahamas, Saint Kitts and Nevis and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Together these countries have pledged to mark at least 20,000 firearms over the next 12 months as a result of this project. The OAS extends special recognition to the Ministry of Defense of El Salvador who has indicated their intention of marking over 200,000 firearms in that country.

In addition, in coordination with the Government of Costa Rica, the OAS organized a regional seminar in December 2010 with marking authorities from 26 countries of the Hemisphere, as well as other governmental and non-governmental experts, to
strengthen cooperation and exchange of information regarding marking practices and procedures. This newly formed regional network of marking practitioners—many of whom we are pleased to note are participating in this meeting today—received a “hands on” demonstration of the firearms marking equipment available to them. Participants were also given the unique opportunity of hearing from a representative of the Regional Center of Small Arms (RECSA) regarding the successes of their similar marking initiative in the Great Lakes Region and Horn of Africa. The OAS firmly believes that this event demonstrates once again the important role that regional organizations can play in helping to strengthen the national capacity of their respective members to combat arms trafficking, and also how different regional organizations—and from different parts of the world no less—can cooperate effectively to advance a common agenda.

Finally, I would like to share that the OAS is the process of drafting a regional assessment on marking practices and legislation in the region in order to better understand existing capacity in the OAS member states to mark firearms, as well as to identify possible technical and legislative needs in this regard. A questionnaire was circulated to all member states and, based on the 14 official responses received (Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Jamaica, Mexico, Paraguay, St. Kitts y Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay), as well as official data collected from other sources—such as country reports to the PoA—preliminary results demonstrate that:

- Of the 18 member states from which we were able to obtain information, 60% have some sort of legislation and/or administrative process in place regarding firearms marking
- Of the 10 member states for which information was available, 80% require that firearms be marked as an integral part of the manufacturing process
- Of 20 countries for which information was available, 55% require that firearms be marked at point of import
- Of 15 countries from which we were able to obtain information, 27% require that confiscated or forfeited firearms be marked.

These results are encouraging, but it is clear that much more remains to be done. The OAS is committed to strengthening mechanisms for ensuring greater public security in the region and to this end is working to encourage all member states to have in place, by the end of 2012, adequate policies and legislation to mark firearms at point of manufacture, import and confiscation.

As such, we call on all OAS member states to consider active participation in all aspects of our Firearms Marking Program. We further welcome the opportunity to strengthen cooperation and collaboration with our governmental and non-governmental partners to facilitate adequate and effective responses to the growing levels of crime and violence generated in Latin America and the Caribbean as a result of firearms trafficking. To this end, the OAS reiterates its commitment to working in support of CIFTA and the UN’s international instruments, including the Programme of Action and the International Tracing Instrument, throughout the Hemisphere.