

CARICOM IMPACS AND CAVR JOIN FORCES TO DISCUSS ARMS CONTROL SYSTEMS IN SMALL ISLAND STATES

The Caribbean is both blessed and cursed with vast oceans – blessed with a beauty that attracts thousands of tourists and their dollars every year; cursed by porous borders that make the islands vulnerable to illicit flows of commodities, including small arms and light weapons. Between 2007-2012, the Caribbean had the second highest firearm-related homicide rate globally – with 31 per 100,000.¹ The flow of illicit arms in the Caribbean is both causing insecurity and devastating the economy. If countries in the Caribbean reduced their homicide rate to that of Costa Rica, economic growth rates would increase by 5.4 percent.²

The Centre for Armed Violence Reduction was pleased to be invited by CARICOM IMPACS to the Caribbean along with the Arms Trade Treaty Baseline Assessment Project (ATT-BAP) to conduct two week-long trainings in early 2017. The workshop aimed to build the capacity of officials to strengthen their arms control systems. We focused on the importance of building a strong interagency coordinating mechanism and appointing a National Point of Contact (NPC), allowing for more effective and efficient means to tackle the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. We also discussed how a comprehensive system that applied international arms standards under the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (UNPoA) could contribute to preventing illicit arms flows.

Officials from Trinidad & Tobago, St Vincent & Grenadines, Grenada, St Lucia, Barbados, Guyana and Suriname joined us for the first week in Trinidad and Tobago from January 23 – 28. Week Two was held in Antigua and Barbuda, January 30 – February 3 with representatives from Antigua and Barbuda, St Kitts & Nevis, Jamaica, Monserrat, the Bahamas and Haiti. Participants came from the various islands' agencies concerned with arms control: the Attorney-General's office, military, police, firearm licensing departments, customs and immigration. The cross-agency perspective meant discussions covered everything from identifying legislative gaps to reporting, to strengthening regional networks for stronger border controls. While legislation, procedures and systems are in place in many Caribbean states, law enforcement was identified as a huge challenge.

As an outcome of these meetings, officials aim to establish a regional network of NPCs to work together in combating illicit arms flows. The first objective is to identify an appropriate coordinating agency within each state system, plus an NPC within each government. While each island is differently affected by illicit flows of small arms and light weapons, regional collaboration is essential to combat trafficking and to reduce armed violence.

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¹ The Economist, 2008

² The Economist, 2008