Madam Under-Secretary General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Dear colleagues and friends,

On behalf of Costa Rica and myself personally, I would like to thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, for her kind words addressed to me. It is a true honor to stand before you as your Chair of the Preparatory Committee of the Fourth United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. I thank the Group of Latin America and the Caribbean for putting forth my nomination, and all member states for their show of confidence in electing me.

This week and in the months ahead, through the Review Conference, it is my commitment to help us set an effective, action-oriented, and forward-looking agenda for the next six years, and to achieve the best possible enabling framework that you, the Member States, need at the national, regional and global levels to achieve tangible reductions in the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects.

As Under-Secretary-General Nakamitsu just reminded us, we gather this year as the scourge of illicit small arms and light weapons, driven by evolving conflicts and other peace and security challenges, is becoming more complex.

We must be ready, this week and in the weeks and months ahead, to redouble of our efforts to meet these challenges with responsive policy guidance.

I am pleased to note that the PoA-ITI process has made many strides over the years to address the constantly changing nature of illicit small arms threats. We have taken account of evolving understanding of what needs to be done to arrest and reduce those threats. Member states, supported by civil society, academia and the private sector, have repeatedly brought new insights to bear, new strategies and measures. And many have been reflected in the commitments and aspirations laid out in outcome documents.

But we have also repeatedly missed opportunities to take decisive action on key issues that have not yet found consensus. I regret to say that the lack of agreement on those issues has cost us valuable time, both in terms of the process and, vitally, for what happens in the world outside, to real women, men, boys and girls in all regions of the world, as a result of illicit small arms and light weapons.

This year, we have another chance.
Dear colleagues, the PoA and the ITI together remain the sole universal framework dedicated to countering illicit small arms and light weapons. Ahead of the Summit of the Future in September of this year, it is on our shoulders to exemplify the importance of multilateral solutions to a scourge that knows no borders. It is therefore vital to advance their full and effective implementation at the national, regional and global levels.

I would like to highlight the fact that the Fourth Review Conference process is already underway. Informal consultations began in December and have continued into January and February. In addition, a series of five regional preparatory consultations is in progress, organized by the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs and its regional centers, with additional consultations with regional groups here at the United Nations Headquarters also in the pipeline.

I had the honour of hearing about the lived experiences, different perspectives and innovative ideas of diverse people from across the Asia-Pacific region at the first consultation held recently in Kathmandu, and I will also take note of the experiences and proposals from other regions. I am convinced that these meetings are important forums for states and other stakeholders to contribute their thinking on key thematic areas for the Review Conference, as well as for generating momentum towards an inclusive outcome. I urge all members states to engage their capitals to participate.

On the basis of the informal consultations and discussions to date, I would like to take note of a number of themes that have emerged as topics of interest and importance for the Fourth Review Conference. These include:

- Improving international cooperation and assistance in implementing the UN PoA
- Challenges and opportunities for the UN Programme of Action and the International Tracing Instrument arising from new technologies and innovation, and consideration of the establishment of an Open-ended Technical Expert Group;
- Continuing efforts to understand and address the diversion of small arms and light weapons from legal to illicit markets throughout their life-cycle;
- Integrating small arms and light weapons control into national development processes; and
- Setting national and regional targets in implementing the UN PoA

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Dear colleagues and friends,

This year, the PoA turns 23 years old. How should we measure our successes and our shortcomings? At the beginning of this Preparatory Committee meeting, let us draw our inspiration from Paragraph 4 of the Preamble of the PoA, in which we collectively determined back in 2001 to:

*reduce the human suffering caused by the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects and to enhance the respect for life and the dignity of the human person through the promotion of a culture of peace.*

Beautiful words, and so well chosen. Let them continue to be our motivation, our guiding principle, our commitment. Let us advance beyond what has been achieved to date, always moving forward, never back.

Thank you once more for the confidence you have placed in me. It is my pledge to repay that confidence by fostering a process that is, to the best of my abilities, fully transparent, inclusive, and consensus-based.
I will need your help at every stage: your constructive dialogue, your willingness to compromise for the sake of consensus, and your commitment to make a tangible difference in the lives of those affected by the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

I am looking forward to the great things I know we can accomplish together this year.

I thank you.