



Research Report

First General Assembly

Issue 1: Preventing the illicit trade and diversion of small arms and light weapons in conflict zones

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Introduction

The illicit trade and diversion of small arms and light weapons in conflict zones present many challenges and dangers to security, sustainable development and international peace. Conflict zones are already prone to violence and the widespread availability of these weapons fuels that violence, contributes to a myriad of human rights violations and prolongs fatal wars. The transport and concealment of small arms and light weapons are relatively easy, allowing them to fall into the hands of dangerous non-state actors, criminal networks and terrorist groups with the aim to undermine national stability and regional security. Several international frameworks under the United Nations system, including the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), the Programme of Action (PoA), and the International Tracing Instrument (ITI), have already implemented measures to address this issue but there are gaps in monitoring and accountability that allow illicit arms flows to persist.

The First General Assembly is responsible for disarmament and international security and recognizes the need to combat the illicit trade and calls for multilateral cooperation to strengthen international norms, enhance transparency in arms transfers and assist states in improving stockpile management and border control. These are essential steps needed to further prevent the diversion of small arms to create a more secure global community.

Definition of Key Terms

1. Programme of Action (PoA):

Adopted in 2001, the United Nations Programme of Action is a politically binding framework that outlines measures for states to prevent, combat, and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects.

2. Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW):

Weapons which are designed for small-group use. For example: pistols, rifles, machine guns, grenade launchers, etc.

3. International Tracing Instrument (ITI):

Adopted in 2005, the ITI is a politically binding UN instrument that traces and identifies small arms and light weapons to prevent the diversion and illicit trade.

4. Arms Trade Treaty (ATT):

Adopted in 2013 and entered the force in 2014, the ATT is a legally binding international treaty that regulates the international trade in conventional arms, including small to further prevent illicit transfers and misuse.

5. Stockpile Management:

The secure storage and maintenance of weapons to prevent theft, loss or diversion.

Background

Post–Cold War stockpile leakage and surplus weapons significantly increased SALW circulation. The weapons have widespread availability due to weak governance, corruption and poor stockpile management and have fuelled both international and regional conflicts along with terrorism and organized crime.

The United Nations Programme of Action (PoA) was a major milestone in 2001 which outlined global measures to prevent and combat the illicit trade in SALW. The International Tracing Instrument which was adopted shortly after in 2005 enhanced the ability to trace and identify diverted weapons while working with the Arms Trade Treaty that came into force in 2014 that became the first legally binding frameworks to regulate global arms transfers.

The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) was re-established in 1998 along with Coordinating Action on Small Arms (CASA) playing vital roles in international cooperation for disarmament. The First General Assembly has emphasised transparency, cooperation and improved implementation over time and despite progress, enforcement gaps particularly in borders have continued to enable illicit arms flows and highlight the need for stronger multilateral action.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

United States:

The United States is one of the largest arms exporters and manufacturers and supports measures to prevent the illicit trade of weapons. However, they prioritize national sovereignty in arms regulation and promote strong border controls. They have not ratified the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)

Russian Federation:

Russia is also a major arms exporter and emphasises state sovereignty much like the U.S and believes in the right to self defence. It supports the PoA but resists that can be seen as limiting legitimate arms trade or external oversight.

China:

China supports the UN framework including the PoA and ITI and also advocates for respect for national jurisdiction regarding arms transfers. They have ratified the ATT.

Germany:

Germany strongly supports the ATT, PoA and ITT and funds disarmament initiatives and post conflict weapon collection in developing regions.

Nigeria:

Nigeria is heavily affected by the illicit flow of SALW due to internal conflicts and weak borders and they advocate for stronger international cooperations for them and nations facing similar challenges.

United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA):

Re-established in 1998 the UNODA promotes disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation to enhance international peace.

United Nations Coordinating Action on Small Arms (CASA):

Established in 1998 CASA coordinates the efforts of multiple UN agencies to address illicit SALW trade.

Small Arms Survey (NGO):

A research project, which is independent and gives information and insight into the flow of small arms in the world, would assist in the formation of evidence-based policy and UN negotiations.

Interpol:

Enforcement of cooperation in international tracing and cooperation of law enforcement agencies to stop transnational arms trafficking networks and diversion.

Possible Solutions

1. Strengthening Legal Frameworks:

Request states to completely enact and harmonize the already existing agreements like the PoA, ATT, and ITI, with stronger export controls, verification of the end-user, and tougher penalties of illegal trade.

2. Improving Stockpile Management:

Capacity-building programs: Support programs should permit states to ensure that stocks of weapons in the country are secure, monitored, and controlled to prevent loss, theft, or diversion.

3. Enhancing Marking and Tracing:

Use of modern technologies to enhance marking and record keeping systems to facilitate easier tracking of illicit or diverted weapons.

4. Regional and International Cooperation:

Enhance greater co-ordination among the states by sharing information, conducting cross-border patrols and collaborating with agencies like INTERPOL and CASA to tear down trafficking links.

5. Supporting Disarmament and Post-Conflict Efforts:

Promote disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) efforts including voluntary weaponry collection efforts in post-conflict zones.

6. Addressing Root Causes:

Invest in governing, economic development and community security in order to minimize the need to seek illicit weapons and prevent a fall back to violence.

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