

FACT SHEET

VIOLENCE MULTIPLIERS: SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

Most present-day conflicts are fought with small arms and light weapons. These are the weapons of choice in civil wars, organised crime, gang warfare and terrorist attacks. They are easy to use, to carry, and to conceal. Illicit flows of small arms and light weapons undermine security and the rule of law, are often a factor behind the forced displacement of civilians and massive human rights violations.

Programme of Action

In 2001, countries adopted the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA). In it, governments agreed to take measures to improve national small arms laws import and export controls, stockpile management, regional cooperation, and international assistance and cooperation.

“Illegal guns can become dreadful force multipliers. They make it possible for pirates to capture the largest ships, for drug lords to randomly kill law enforcers, for bandits to hijack humanitarian aid convoys, for illegal owners to intimidate their households and commit gender-based violence, and for mobs to terrorise complete cities. All over the world, uncontrolled small arms in circulation form a massive threat to safety, property, stability and development. Controlling the illegal spread and curbing the misuse of guns have been important topics on the global disarmament agenda.”

Angela Kane,
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs



United Nations Weapons Collection in Liberia

International Tracing Instrument

To effectively prevent and counter the diversion of small arms and light weapons, law enforcement authorities must be able to trace recovered illicit weapons to their point of diversion. Marking these weapons at the time of their manufacture and import facilitates weapons tracing. To this end, in 2005, the General Assembly adopted the International Tracing Instrument (ITI), which provides a framework for governments to cooperate with one another in weapons tracing – fulfilling one of the commitments governments made in the Programme of Action.

Periodic review of implementation

A review conference is convened every six years to assess progress in the implementation of these two agreements. The most recent review conference was held in New York in 2012. Intersessionally, the United

Nations convenes Biennial Meetings of States in which governments discuss challenges and opportunities related to the implementation of these instruments. Civil society organizations as well as regional and international organizations are also active participants in both the review conferences and the biennial meetings. Additionally, countries have agreed to hold a Meeting of Governmental Experts (MGE), to benefit from specialists on technical matters pertaining to small arms control.

In 2012, the General Assembly adopted a schedule of meetings for the period from 2012 to 2018 that had been agreed at the Second Review Conference. Accordingly, the next Biennial Meeting of States will be held in New York in 2014, and the Meeting of Governmental Experts in 2015.

Small arms and the Security Council

The United Nations Security Council has been increasingly concerned with the issue of small arms. Every two years the Council holds a thematic meeting on small arms. It also often debates closely associated topics such as children and armed conflict; the relationship between women, peace and security; the protection of civilians in armed conflict; violations of arms embargoes; and terrorism.

The role of the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs

- Organise and support meetings on the two relevant United Nations agreements
- Facilitate exchange of information
- Provide technical advice and assistance to governments, also through the UN Regional Centres
- Develop tools, guidelines and standards to facilitate implementation of commitments
- Promote system-wide coordination and cooperation among the 23 United Nations entities working on small arms issues
- Cooperate with regional organizations and relevant international organizations.

International Small Arms Control Standards

At the most practical level, the United Nations makes available a set of **international small arms control standards (ISACS)**. These provide comprehensive guidance to practitioners and policymakers on a broad range of small arms control issues, such as strengthening national legislation, safely collecting and destroying illicit weapons, enhancing border controls, improving stockpile management, enhancing community security and preventing armed violence.

Go to www.smallarmsstandards.org.

Regional cooperation

UNODA staff who work at Headquarters and in the UN Regional Centres for Peace and Disarmament facilitate regional cooperation and assist countries on implementation of UN small arms instruments. Assistance ranges from outreach and capacity building with regional organizations, to organising national training courses and national arms destruction events.

Supporting activities

To support activities related to implementation of the Programme of Action for the period 2013-2018, the UN has a trust fund in place.

For information, contact conventionalarms-unoda@un.org.

www.un.org/disarmament