

Update #2: United Nations 2021 First Committee

Small Arms and Light Weapons

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During the remainder of the general debate, states continued to express their concerns over the deterioration of international security, caused in part by the pervasive availability of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and ammunition as a key enabler of armed violence and conflict. A number of states, including Ghana, Costa Rica, Burkina Faso, and Thailand highlighted the consequences of the widespread availability of SALW, such as the fueling of terrorism, international human rights and humanitarian law violations, transnational organised crime, and impeded socioeconomic development, which has also been made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many states emphasised the need for the implementation of and compliance with existing legal instruments such as the UN Programme of Action (UNPoA) and the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). Bulgaria, the Dominican Republic, and Portugal argued for the universalisation of the ATT as an effective way to curb illicit transfers of SALW. Egypt, however, stated that in its view the ATT has shortcomings and lacks a clear mandate.

Namibia, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Dominican Republic, Algeria, Egypt, Myanmar, and Ghana, among others, noted the positive outcome of the UNPoA Seventh Biennial Meeting of States (BMS7). This included some states that were not active participants in the BMS7 (for example, Bulgaria and the Dominican Republic). The fact that so many states have noted their satisfaction with the outcome of BMS7 seems indicative that states see the UNPoA as continuing to be a relevant and an important framework for addressing illicit SALW.

While states also continued to raise the importance of integrating gender into policies and processes addressing SALW, the participation of women in the First Committee has become an important, if rudimentary, metric of the considerable amount of work to be done. In concluding the general debate, the Chair of the First Committee noted that during the general debate 137 delegates made statements, of which 33 were made by women. This statistic was also taken up by Costa Rica, which stated that in the First Committee, less than a quarter of statements made are likely to be given by a woman. In reference to a joint statement by sixty-four member states during BMS7, Costa Rica stated that it is clear that small arms and light weapons are a gender issue, and gender is a small arms and light weapons issue. Yet this still needs to be translated into action.

National efforts

A number of states used their first thematic debate statements to outline concrete steps they are taking at the national level to address the issue of SALW. Nigeria stated that it has established a framework to work with civil society organisations to increase the participation of stakeholders in its efforts to address SALW proliferation. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) noted the work of the Small Arms National Commission (CNC-ALPC) and a workshop held in June 2021 to evaluate its national action plan and to plan activities for 2022. This activity follows on a joint training programme led in collaboration with the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC), which supported the development of a gender-sensitive monitoring and reporting

mechanism to track the implementation of the country's national action plan (NAP) on small arms control and armed violence reduction.¹

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and military expenditure

The United Nations 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a blueprint for a better, more sustainable, and peaceful future for all. The links between achieving the SDGs, reducing military expenditure, and addressing SALW were made by a number of states. Portugal emphasised the link between security and sustainable development while Sierra Leone noted that military expenditures could be used to pursue the implementation of the SDGs. Bangladesh called on member states to imagine what the world would be like if military expenditures for 2020 (which amounted to 2 trillion USD) had been spent addressing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mozambique underlined that disarmament is important for sustainable development and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, yet economic benefits have been prioritised over human life. Ghana made the link between the 2030 Agenda and the African Union's "Silencing the Guns by 2030" initiative. Colombia emphasised that it is essential to address current and emerging challenges and to integrate the same efforts in the implementation of the UNPoA with those being made towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Ammunition

States like Romania, Bulgaria, Uruguay, Botswana, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Ghana, and Costa Rica recognised the need to include ammunition as an integral part of the issue of SALW. The consensus outcome document of the Group of Governmental Experts on Problems Arising from the Accumulation of Conventional Ammunition Stockpiles in Surplus (GGE) was recognised by Bulgaria, Hungary, and Colombia as creating a framework that would address existing gaps in ammunition controls and presented recommendations which are "constructive for discussion and action." While Ghana also lauded the GGE's report, it also stated its belief that the member states who are currently applying the provisions of the UNPoA to ammunition should continue to do so. On the issue of ammunition itself, Ghana strongly recommended a holistic approach throughout the life cycle of ammunition, to ensure the safe and secure management of conventional ammunition and prevent the diversion of stockpiles to unauthorised users.

Interactive informal exchange

Ambassador Martin Kimani of Kenya, Chair of the BMS7, spoke on Friday, 15 October during a panel discussion and exchange with independent experts and other high-level officials. The chair of the GGE on ammunition was meant to also join this session but was not able to do so, and instead will join the third virtual briefing meeting scheduled for 21 October. Ambassador Kimani reflected on the lead up to BMS7 and emphasised the fact that flexibility, commitment, and cooperation between states led to a matured draft outcome document. He noted that it was this multilateralism that led to the unanimous adoption of the outcome document, which sent a strong signal of the support of member states on the continuation of the UNPoA process. Ambassador Kimani highlighted these achievements in particular:

- Agreement on specific actions to prevent diversion of SALW to unauthorised recipients;
- Inclusion of two paragraphs on ammunition;
- Reaffirmation of a commitment to strengthen link between the UNPoA, the International Tracing Instrument (ITI), and the 2030 Agenda;
- Important strides made on the issue of gender;
- References to polymer and modular weapons; and
- Agreement on establishing voluntary national targets to measure progress of PoA implementation.

Ambassador Kimani recognised that despite BMS7's progressive outcome, member states admitted that there are still many challenges preventing the effective implementation of the UNPoA and ITI and that there is a need for enhanced sustainable development and cooperation between states. As such, member states agreed that during BMS8 (scheduled to take place in June 2022) they will consider means to enhance UNPoA and ITI modalities and procedures, including through the fellowship training programme that was established by BMS7.

Next week resolutions should be available, including the omnibus resolution on SALW tabled annually by Colombia, South Africa, and Japan, as well as others that are relevant to SALW in various ways. No doubt we will continue to hear statements from states on the impacts of SALW on human lives. Hopefully, states will discuss in more concrete ways what steps they are committed to taking to translate their words into action.

Notes

1. These workshops are part of a 3-year project led by the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) and funded by the European Union in support of gender mainstreamed policies, programmes and actions in the fight against small arms trafficking and misuse, in line with the Women, Peace and Security agenda. The DRC is one of the six countries in Africa to participate in an in-country training programme on gender-mainstreamed policies in small arms control. IANSA is an implementing partner in this project and facilitated the participation of civil society organisations in the workshops.