

Update #3: United Nations 2021 First Committee Small Arms and Light Weapons

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As the thematic debates concluded this week, states continued to express how critical the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (UNPoA) is for controlling the devastating effects of the illicit trade, transfer, and circulation of small arms and light weapons (SALW). France and Switzerland both spoke of the importance of existing frameworks, such as the UNPoA, and the need to implement existing treaty obligations (such as the Arms Trade Treaty). States also spoke about the work of the UN regional disarmament centres.

Indonesia, speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), noted the importance of UN activities at the regional level to increase stability and security and that the continued maintenance of the three regional centres should be promoted. Brunei-Darussalam, speaking on behalf of the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), also reaffirmed its support for the Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific (UNRCPD) in promoting regional disarmament priorities and fostering cooperation in the ASEAN region. Togo spoke about the work of the UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC), noting its valuable work in reducing illicit SALW and welcomed a new project managed by UNREC focused on physical security in the management of weapons stocks that Japan has financially supported.

Resolutions

Cluster 4 (conventional weapons)

L.43, [“The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects”](#) is an omnibus resolution tabled annually by Colombia, South Africa, and Japan. L.43 contains many substantive changes from last year’s resolution. The resolution adds a preambular paragraph which recognises that national control systems for the transfer of conventional arms contribute to the prevention and eradication of the illicit trade in SALW and that states can integrate applicable policies and practices in SALW controls with a view to strengthening the implementation of the UNPoA.

A new operative paragraph (OP) 3 on the effective management of SALW emphasises the need for states to “redouble national efforts to provide for the safe, secure, comprehensive and effective management of stockpiles” in order to prevent, combat, and eradicate the diversion of SALW.

OP8 is also new and endorses the outcome document of the Seventh Biennial Meeting of States (BMS7). OP10 reflects the decision that the Eighth Biennial Meeting of States (BMS8) on the UNPoA will convene from 27 June-1 July 2022 in New York City at the United Nations Headquarters.

OP2 “emphasises the need for the equal, full and effective participation of women in all decisionmaking and implementation processes relating to the Programme of Action and its International Tracing Instrument”.

OP13 encourages states to consider the recent developments in manufacturing, technology, and design in particular with regards to polymer and modular weapons, and encourages states to strengthen normative frameworks and cooperation between law enforcement agencies to prevent unauthorised recipients from acquiring SALW.

OP14 (previously OP10), is also new and focuses on international cooperation and assistance to effectively implement the UNPoA and the need for national ownership of programmes, as well as noting the need for international cooperation to include improved funding arrangements, technology transfer, and adequate training and support programmes.

OPs 32, 33, and 34 are all new paragraphs. OP32 calls upon the UN Secretariat to develop a good practice document on marking practices of polymer and modular weapons. OP33 seeks the views of member states to enhance international cooperation and to present recommendations for consideration during BMS8. OP34 requests the Secretariat to present funding for a fellowship training programme on SALW in order to strengthen technical knowledge and expertise in areas related to the implementation of the UNPoA.

L.15, “Assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons and collecting them” does not contain any substantive changes from last year. The United Nations Secretary General’s (UNSG) report *Assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons and collecting them and the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects* (A/76/284) was submitted in response to two requests of the General Assembly, contained in last year’s resolution 75/56 on assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons and collecting them and resolution 75/241 on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects. The UNSG’s report focuses on implementation of these previous resolutions and was released August 2021. The report, in part, provides a summary of the outcome of BMS7. It points out that agreement was reached at BMS7, most notably on ensuring that international humanitarian law and international human rights law would be taken into consideration in national small arms and light weapons transfer decisions; that states would undertake export risk assessments and include authenticated end user and/or end-use certification and effective legal and enforcement measures. The strong language on the highly gendered nature of small arms and light weapons in the BMS7 outcome document was also noted. States reaffirmed the importance of accounting for the differing impacts of the illicit trade on women, men, girls, and boys and encouraged the collection of data disaggregated by sex, age, and disability for evidence-based policymaking.

The report also included reports on the work of the Coordinating Action on Small Arms mechanism; the implementation of the UNSG’s Agenda for Disarmament; and follow-up action on other initiatives, such as the support of the United Nations for the African Union’s “Silencing the Guns by 2030” initiative; gender-responsive arms control policies, programmes, and initiatives; and updates on major small arms and light weapons programmes undertaken by other United Nations bodies.

L.47, “Problems arising from the accumulation of conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus” integrates the recommendations made by the Group of Governmental Experts on Problems Arising from the Accumulation of Conventional Ammunition Stockpiles in Surplus (GGE on ammunition) which

delivered its final report in September 2021. The resolution takes into consideration the dangers posed by unplanned explosions at munitions stocks sites and the diversion of ammunition from stockpiles to the illegal market and recognises that the lives of civilians have been negatively impacted as a result. L.47 encourages states to consider ammunition management as an intrinsic part of their actions for achieving relevant targets of the Sustainable Development Goals related to the reduction of illicit arms flows. The resolution prompts states to develop voluntary national action plans on the secure management of conventional ammunition.

Further, the resolution establishes an openended working group to elaborate a set of political commitments in order to address existing gaps in ammunition management, without prejudice to national legal systems addressing national ammunition ownership, possession, and use. The open-ended working group will meet for two fiveday sessions in 2022 and one five-day session in 2023. L.47 recognises the need to encourage the involvement of both women and men in ammunition management practices and policies. L.47 also acknowledges the importance and usefulness of existing instruments, programmes, and groups such as the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines (IATG), the SaferGuard Knowledge Resource Management programme, the Ammunition Management Advisory Team, and the Open-ended Working Group to Negotiate an International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons.

Cluster 6: regional disarmament and security

L.30, “[Regional disarmament](#)” does not contain any substantive changes from last year. L.30 stresses that sustained efforts are needed to make progress on the entire range of disarmament issues.

L.31, “[Conventional arms control at the regional and subregional levels](#)” does not contain any substantive changes from last year. L.31 recognises the crucial role of conventional arms control in the promotion of regional and international peace and security. In the UNSG’s report (A/76/92) following up on last year’s resolution on this subject, a summary of the responses of states who shared their views on the subject was provided. Six states provided information (Albania, Cuba, Czechia, Portugal, Serbia, and Ukraine). Albania, in part, shared information on the work it has undertaken to develop a road map for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse, and trafficking of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition in the western Balkans. Albania stated that the purpose of this road map is to serve as a guiding and consensual document, developed and owned by the regional authorities, for achieving a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition in the western Balkans. Cuba stated that a fundamental principle should be that conventional arms control is based on respect for, and the recognition of, national control measures and that states should be primarily responsible for the implementation of measures for the control of their weapons. Portugal stated that it has implemented a number of changes to its national laws in relation to firearms, including developing stricter rules for museums with firearms, sport shooters, and firearm collectors, and has established technical specifications for marking firearms and their essential components.

L.32, “[Confidence-building measures in the regional and subregional context](#)” does not contain any substantive changes from last year. L.32 emphasises that the objective of confidence-building measures should be to help strengthen international peace and security. The resolution also encourages the promotion of bilateral and regional confidence-building measures to avoid conflict.

Regional centres

L.18, “United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific” contains some substantive changes from last year’s resolution. In 2020, the resolution highlighted the work of the Centre as part of the 18th United Nations-Republic of Korea Joint Conference on Disarmament and NonProliferation Issues (held in Seoul, 13-14 November 2019); a training workshop for states of Southeast Asia on the *MOSAIC Module 04.10*; and a project providing technical and legal assistance to Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste toward the implementation of the UNPoA, among others. This year, the resolution underlines the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1540 in South Asia and Mongolia, as well as a capacity-building training for States of Asia and the Pacific in preparing and submitting online national reports on the implementation of the UNPoA.

L.21, “United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa” contains substantive changes compared to last year’s resolution. A paragraph has been added to the resolution which “calls upon Member States and other bilateral and multilateral stakeholders to further enable the Regional Centre to provide adequate assistance to African Member States on arms control and disarmament from a human security perspective notably in the following areas of arms control: prevention of violent extremism, youth and peace and security, and women and peace and security.” In OP7, the reference to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons, and on Their Destruction has been deleted.

L.38, “United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean” contains limited substantive changes. In one of the preambular paragraphs, the resolution now refers to the “implementation” of the *Roadmap for Implementing the Caribbean Priority Actions on the Illicit Proliferation of Firearms and Ammunition across the Caribbean in a Sustainable Manner by 2030 (“Caribbean Firearms Roadmap”)* to prevent and combat the illicit trafficking in arms and ammunition instead of its “elaboration”. Furthermore, in OP2, which focuses on welcoming the proposals made by the countries of the regions in the areas of peace and disarmament, prior language about nuclear disarmament, confidence-building measures, arms control and limitation as well as transparency has been deleted.

L.28, “United Nations regional centres for peace and disarmament” does not contain any substantive changes from last year.

Informal exchange

During the informal exchange that took place on 21 October, the Chairperson of the GGE on ammunition provided his report back on the GGE’s work. Other briefers included Ms. Melanie Regimbal, Director of UNLIREC; Mr. Yuri Kryvonos, Director of UNRCPD; and Mr. Anselme N. Yabouri, Director of UNREC.

Mr. Markus Bleinroth of Germany, Chairperson of the GGE on ammunition, spoke extensively of the work of the GGE that concluded its work in September 2021 and delivered a report that was adopted by consensus. Germany convened six consultations throughout 2018 and 2019, which explored multidimensional challenges with a particular focus on the dual challenges posed by the diversion of ammunition and unplanned explosions. Following this informal consultative process, the GGE met for its first formal session in 2020 before the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted the Group’s work. The final session was held from 7-10 September 2021. The GGE noted applicable existing frameworks and

commitments as well as overarching issues such as cooperation and assistance at the regional and global levels. The GGE also elaborated practical measures to address safety and security of ammunition at each stage of ammunition management. The GGE also recommended the establishment of a comprehensive framework and a set of political commitments on ammunition. He concluded by saying that he hopes the final report will result in global action to address the challenges associated with ammunition. The recommendations listed in the report have been transposed into the resolution on ammunition (L.47), so that its adoption will signal the acceptance of such on the part of all UN member states.

Ms. Melanie Regimbal highlighted some of the work led by UNLIREC on SALW. She stated that 15 CARICOM states and the Dominican Republic have received support to develop national action plans as part of the Caribbean Firearms Roadmap. Ms. Regimbal also talked about a pilot training project on combating arms trafficking and the technical guidelines UNLIREC has provided on securing arms depots to prevent the diversion of SALW and its ammunition.

Mr. Yuri Kryvonos underlined that the UNCRPD's priorities were to contribute to building national capacities, empowering women, and reducing illegal arm flows and gun violence. Mr. Kryvonos highlighted the work of the regional centre in Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Papua New Guinea where workshops on the integration of gender considerations into policies and actions to fight the misuse and abuse of SALW took place earlier this year. Mr. Kryvonos also mentioned IANSA's contributions to this work.

The Director of UNREC, Mr. Anselme Yabouri, stated that UNREC continues to assist member states and provides support to initiatives like "Silencing the Guns". Mr. Yabouri also stated that the Centre puts emphasis on addressing the issue of stockpiles of ammunition management and security. The director highlighted the scope of the European Union projects that are being implemented in Africa, including the one dedicated to gender mainstreaming in small arms control, which have exceeded their original implementation scope.