

UPDATE #4:

77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) First Committee on Disarmament and International Security

Small Arms and Light Weapons

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On the final two days of the thematic discussion on conventional weapons, states emphasised the long-lasting effects of small arms and light weapons (SALW) given the immense scale of deaths, physical and mental injuries, displacement of civilians, human rights violations, destabilising effects on states, worsening of social inequalities, and other harms they cause. For example, Mali stated that the illicit spread of SALW into the hands of terrorist groups and nonstate actors is at the heart of the security crisis in the Northern and Central parts of the country. This insecurity remains a major challenge to sustainable development, especially in reducing poverty, accessing healthcare and education, and preventing diseases or as it relates to gender empowerment.

The Dominican Republic, Paraguay, and Chile shared some of the actions undertaken to counter the harms caused by the easy availability of SALW. The Dominican Republic reiterated its commitment to fight against the illicit trade and widespread availability of SALW by reinforcing arms acquisition control measures, strengthening institutions, building capacity, and fully complying with domestic and international legal commitments, including the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (UNPoA), the International Tracing Instrument (ITI), and the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). As such, the Dominican Republic has launched a Comprehensive Strategy for Citizen Security, which includes a disarmament plan entailing stricter requirements for the carrying and possession of weapons, the promotion of the voluntary surrender of firearms by civilians, as well as the location and seizure of all unregistered weapons. Paraguay has issued an open-ended suspension of arms and ammunition imports (a suspension that will be gradually lifted in response to achievements made in terms of security and control measures). Chile will establish a two-year moratorium on the entry of small arms for sale and use by civilians, in order to reduce the number of weapons in the hands of civilians and interrupt the flow of legal weapons diverted to criminal activities.

During the portion of the First Committee dedicated to regional disarmament, Ms Radha Day, Chief of the Regional Disarmament, Information and Outreach Branch of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), provided a briefing on the work of UNODA's Regional Centres for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC), Asia and the Pacific (UNRCPPD), and Latin America and the Caribbean (UNLIREC) over the past year. Ms Day opened her statement by emphasising that the regional centres operate in different environments.

In Africa, particularly in the Sahel and Saharan sub-regions, the illicit trade in SALW undermines peace and security at multiple levels. In that sense, she reported that the continent remains entangled in organised crime, insecurity, piracy, acts of terrorism, and violent extremism.

In Asia, SALW pose a threat to sustainable development. The region accounts for the lowest number of state parties to the ATT and the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition (Firearms Protocol), and also has low reporting rates on the implementation of the UNPoA.

In Latin America, illicit small arms and ammunition trafficking by criminal organisations is an obstacle to safety and security. Ms Day underlined that the centres work hand in hand with other regional organisations to address these challenges in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in particular target 16.4.

Ms Day concluded her statement by reporting that UNREC worked on 15 projects including supporting the African Union's "Silencing the Guns in Africa" initiative in Liberia, Togo, and Tanzania during Africa Amnesty Month activities. UNRCPD worked with six countries in Asia and the Pacific to integrate gender perspectives in small arms control and on establishing gunfree zones in the South, Southeast, and Pacific regions. In Latin America and the Caribbean, UNLIREC supported disarmament-related regional and national strategies and action plans and created a new course on weapons trafficking, which has been delivered in Chile, Colombia, Peru, and the Dominican Republic, with more countries forthcoming. The centres, she noted, continue to promote youth engagement in small arms control initiatives. For example, UNLIREC started a LinkedIn page to create a space for youth to connect with peers, experts, and other activists.

This week, another resolution on SALW was submitted:

L.76, "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. In one of its preambular paragraphs, the resolution recalls the report of the UN Secretary-General entitled "In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all", in which he emphasised that "States must strive just as hard to eliminate the threat of small arms and light weapons as they do to eliminate the threat of weapons of mass destruction." This sentiment was echoed by many member states over the last few weeks who compared SALW as being as dangerous as weapons of mass destruction. During the thematic debate this week, the Holy See made a similar remark by reiterating its support to multilateral efforts aiming to strengthen and fully implement the UNPoA and ITI, stating that these instruments are means to seriously impede the nefarious effects of the uncontrolled spread of illegal arms, and emphasising that although SALW may be referred to as "weapons of limited destruction", they claim hundreds of thousands of lives around the globe every year and their horrendous impact is widespread and devastating for humanity.

Next week, voting on resolutions related to SALW will begin and states will be invited to give general statements and explanations of votes.