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The UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons: An analysis of outcomes from BMS8 and looking forward to RevCon4



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I. INTRODUCTION

The proliferation and pervasive misuse of small arms and light weapons (SALW) are an enormous threat to human security, contributing to entrenched patterns of armed violence, domestic and transnational organized crime, terrorism, armed conflict, and the destruction of livelihoods. All too often, the physical, mental, and emotional harm inflicted with firearms on victims and survivors goes uninvestigated, unpunished, and without reparation, allowing the perpetrators to act with impunity.

Since 2001, States have agreed to a constellation of measures that address the trade in and misuse of SALW, including the [United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspects](#) (Programme of Action, or UNPoA, 2001) and the accompanying [International Tracing Instrument](#) (ITI, 2005), as well as the [UN Firearms Protocol](#) (entry into force, 2005), which supplemented the [UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime](#) (entry into force, 2003), the [Arms Trade Treaty](#) (ATT, entry into force, 2014), and other related sub-regional and regional instruments.¹

The UNPoA is an international framework that enables the regular consideration of a wide range of measures at national, regional, and international levels to prevent, combat, and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons “in all its aspects.” Examples include establishing effective national measures to control SALW production, SALW stockpiles, and the transfer, export, import, transit, and brokering of SALW. The UNPoA is not a treaty with legally binding obligations. Rather, all UN Member States adopted the UNPoA (and the ITI) by consensus, which means that all States committed themselves to implementing those instruments.

¹ As of 1 September 2023, the Firearms Protocol has 122 States Parties, and the Arms Trade Treaty has 113 States Parties.

As part of the UNPoA process, states are to regularly provide national reports with information on how they are implementing the measures in the UNPoA. The Biennial Meetings of States (BMS) take place every two years to consider national, regional, and global efforts to implement the UNPoA and ITI and a review conference (RevCon) is held every six years to review progress and agree on ways to strengthen implementation measures, with a Preparatory Committee meeting (PrepCom) preceding each RevCon.

This briefing paper focuses on key outcomes and implications of deliberations at the eighth Biennial Meeting of States (BMS8) on the UNPoA, held in New York from 27 June–1 July 2022.² The paper is intended to provide background information for diplomats, officials, and civil society. The aim is to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of key BMS8 outcomes that are of particular concern to IANSA. It includes some suggestions on how to make further progress on those outcomes at the fourth Review Conference on the UNPoA (RevCon4), which is scheduled to be held from 17–28 June 2024.

Overall, the BMS8 outcome document makes progress on many issues. In several cases, States built on previous advances on key issues such as gender, setting national targets, and the need for sustained international cooperation and assistance to fully implement the UNPoA and the ITI.

II. EVALUATION OF IANSA'S SIX KEY ISSUES FOR BMS8

The Biennial Meetings of States, Preparatory Committee meetings, and Review Conferences provide IANSA's members with opportunities to capture States' attention and encourage the adoption of outcome documents that strengthen the UNPoA and its implementation. In the lead-up to BMS8, IANSA identified six key issues as a way of focusing its work. IANSA's preparatory work included a wide range of activities, including providing background information on the six key issues and suggested wording for proposals that could be made by delegations, working with diplomats on strategy, and mobilizing NGO participants to lobby their governments. The BMS8 outcome document reflects progress on many of these key issues. The critical test will be the extent to which States meet these commitments.

The following sections address the six key issues and analyze the results of BMS8 for each one. They also suggest possible next steps on each of these issues in the lead-up to RevCon4. The analysis of these six key issues and ways forward will help further the discussion of IANSA's priorities for RevCon4.

² The BMS8 outcome document is UN General Assembly document A/CONF.192/BMS/2022/1, 12 July 2022, available [here](#).

ISSUE 1. Building on the gender outcomes of RevCon3 and BMS7 and ensuring the inclusion of other traditionally underrepresented groups such as survivors, youth, and those most vulnerable to the effects of armed violence.**Discussion and results**

The word “gender” was not mentioned in the original text of the UNPoA. Women were only addressed in the preamble, with language on “the negative impact on women and the elderly” of the illicit trade in SALW.³ However, in recent Biennial Meetings of States and at the third Review Conference (RevCon3), States began to address gender issues and moved beyond solely discussing women as victims. Gender mainstreaming is one of the policy areas in which States have made the most significant progress in the last several years.

At BMS8, States that are “gender champions” were highly effective in countering efforts by some States to weaken the wording on gender in the proposed outcome document. Instead, the language was strengthened, including a call for “the full, equal, meaningful, and effective” participation of women and for States to mainstream gender analyses of the effects of illicit SALW trade and UNPoA implementation efforts.⁴

Significantly, States have agreed to:

“take account of the differential impacts of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons on women, men, girls and boys including by collecting, where feasible, data disaggregated by sex, age and disability and utilizing analysis mechanisms to inform evidence-based gender-sensitive policymaking and programming...”⁵

“take account of the differential impact of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons on women, men, girls and boys, and to strengthen, where they do not exist, develop response mechanisms to address such impacts.”⁶

In 2022 reports, 43 States reported that they took gender considerations into account in their implementation of the UNPoA. It is a good start, but it is not sufficient. Gender mainstreaming, as referenced in the BMS8 outcome document, requires much more than simply taking gender considerations into account. For example, the UN’s Modular Small-Arms-Control Implementation Compendium (MOSAIC) states that:

“Gender mainstreaming means ensuring that the impact – on females and males – of all small arms and light weapons control initiatives is considered at every stage of assessment, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Gender mainstreaming allows for a better understanding of the roles that men and women play in relation to small arms and light weapons, in times of conflict, post-conflict reconstruction and peace.”⁷

³ UN Programme of Action, A/CONF.192/15, 9-20 July 2001, Preamble para. 6, available [here](#).

⁴ BMS8 outcome document, para. 9. Please note that throughout this text, there are references to specific paragraphs of the BMS8 outcome document. These are illustrative examples, not comprehensive lists of all references to a particular topic.

⁵ BMS8 outcome document, para. 51

⁶ BMS8 outcome document, para. 54

⁷ [UN MOSAIC module 6.10](#), p. vi

The BMS8 outcome document encourages “the mainstreaming of a gender perspective and youth-related considerations in the implementation of the Programme of Action, including gender and youth-based action plans.”⁸ This could be an opportunity to move beyond rhetoric to action by sharing good practices among States that have been more active in including gender perspectives in their work and more successful in focusing on youth needs and voices. Until recently, youth have often been ignored in the UNPoA process and proposals.

In the late stages of the adoption of the BMS8 outcome document, States deleted the wording in the draft referring to victims and survivors, suggesting that some States were unwilling to specifically and publicly recognize the extensive physical, economic and social harm caused by SALW. While the BMS8 text does have two general references to “people affected by armed violence,”⁹ in contrast, the BMS7 outcome document contained three specific references to “victims and survivors.” Both BMS8 paragraphs included text that was similar to text in BMS7.¹⁰ In addition, however, BMS7 contained a paragraph that mentioned victims and survivors, while also highlighting important connections between the UNPoA and ITI and conflict prevention, crisis management, and peacebuilding policies and programmes.¹¹ None of those terms were included in the BMS8 outcome document.

Next steps

A more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of gender mainstreaming, and of terms such as ‘gender-based violence’ is needed.¹² For example, even the MOSAIC definition of gender mainstreaming is not fully inclusive, as it assumes a gender binary. Fortunately, the definition could easily be updated. IANSA’s report “Strength in Diversity: Amplifying the Voices of Women Campaigners Against Gun Violence,” has an inclusive explanation of gender-based armed violence:

“Gender-based armed violence is often presumed to be inflicted only or primarily on women and girls, but this understanding fails to take into account the full scope of the issue. For example, the gendered impact of small arms proliferation and misuse, which includes sexual violence and slavery, also affects LGBTQI+2 people, who are frequently omitted from definitions of women and girls. In addition, men and boys account for the vast majority of violent deaths, including from gun homicides and in direct armed conflict, and these often result from enforced recruitment of boys and young men and from them being targeted by soldiers, police, armed groups, or criminal gangs on the basis of their gender.....Gender-based armed violence includes violence that is directed at people based on discriminating norms and practices relating to their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, and/or gender roles in society.”¹³

⁸ BMS8 outcome document, para.79

⁹ BMS8 outcome document, paras. 6 and 31

¹⁰ Both BMS8 paragraphs included text that was similar to text in BMS7, with the exception of the substitution of “people affected by armed violence” for “victims and survivors.” BMS8 outcome document para. 6 is quite similar to BMS7 para. 18, while BMS8 para. 31 is quite similar to BMS7 para. 55.

¹¹ BMS7 outcome document, para. 15: “States further recognized that the full and effective implementation of the Programme of Action and the International Tracing Instrument support conflict prevention, crisis management and peacebuilding policies and programmes which involve all relevant parties, including victims and survivors impacted by armed violence.”¹¹

¹² For additional information on these issues, see Sarah Masters, “[Strength in Diversity: Amplifying the Voices of Women Campaigners Against Gun Violence](#),” IANSA, May 2022.

¹³ Strength in Diversity, pp. 1-2

It's important to continue promoting a comprehensive understanding of gender mainstreaming, looking for opportunities to discuss and make progress on these issues and seeking additional States to lead this work in the UNPoA process. This work needs to be sustained over time; in addition to building on past efforts, it is also important to ensure that new government officials, agency officials, and diplomats are well-informed about these issues. States need to implement the outcomes of BMS8 with particular attention to the collection of data disaggregated by sex, age, and disability, and the differential impact of illicit SALW on people of all genders.

There are still significant concerns with respect to the lack of gender diversity of the delegations in terms of their representation, their leadership, and who speaks for the delegations. Representation of groups such as survivors, youth, and those most at risk from SALW violence is also lacking. At RevCon4, these problems can be lessened by States ensuring that people from underrepresented communities are part of their delegations and are full participants in the negotiations. Meaningful participation cannot be achieved by mere numbers alone.

ISSUE 2. Enhancing provisions for the collection and destruction of SALW and their ammunition

Discussion and results

The timely collection and destruction of illicit, obsolete, and surplus SALW and ammunition is a primary method of preventing the excessive and destabilizing accumulations of such material and ensuring that it will not be diverted to illicit markets or to unauthorized end users or end uses. Destruction requires ensuring that the weapons are permanently inoperable and non-repairable; simply taking the weapons out of service is insufficient. The BMS8 outcome document calls for consideration "in the relevant mandates of United Nations peace operations, follow-up missions and regional peace support operations, in particular provisions on the collection, identification, recording, tracing and destruction of illicit small arms and light weapons..."¹⁴ States that can do so are encouraged to support the building of institutional capacities to prevent diversion through "safe, sustainable, secure and efficient management of stockpiles of small arms and light weapons and the responsible disposal, preferably through destruction, of any surplus."¹⁵

Similar wording was in the BMS7 outcome document. In addition, however, the BMS7 outcome document had spelled out the need:

"To undertake, to the greatest extent possible, the destruction of surplus small arms and light weapons, which should be undertaken and verified by authorized entities only and to ensure that when small arms and light weapons are permanently deactivated, that standards as close as possible to destruction are applied and that the weapons have been rendered permanently inoperable; and exchange information, tools and existing standards in this regard, with a view to identifying good practices, including certificates of irreversible deactivations which can supplement existing records and the requirement that deactivation is undertaken and verified by authorized entities only."¹⁶

¹⁴ BMS8 outcome document, para. 57

¹⁵ BMS8 outcome document, para. 77

¹⁶ BMS7 outcome document, Preamble, para. 49

Ammunition was not addressed directly in the BMS8 outcome document except for a cross-reference to a new parallel UN process, the “open-ended working group (OEWG) established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 76/233 to elaborate a set of political commitments as a new global framework that will address existing gaps in through-life ammunition management.”¹⁷

The OEWG on ammunition elaborated a new global framework consisting of 15 objectives to address existing gaps in through-life ammunition management. It completed its work in June 2023. In its final report, under Objective 10 (“Deny unauthorized recipients, including criminals, organized criminal groups and terrorists, access to useable cached, abandoned and uncleared conventional ammunition and its energetic material”), one of the suggested measures to meet this objective is for States to:

“seek support of conventional ammunition manufacturers to declare to their national Governments surplus and obsolete conventional ammunition stockpiles that could present safety and security risks, and explore cooperation on responsible disposal, preferably through destruction of such surplus or obsolete conventional ammunition stockpiles, as appropriate.”¹⁸

Next steps

It is important to keep focusing on the destruction of illicit, obsolete, and surplus SALW and their ammunition, building on the results of both BMS7 and BMS8. Destruction breaks the cycle of violence, in which weapons can recirculate from one conflict to another. Discussions on international cooperation and assistance should consider support to States for acquiring the equipment and developing the technical expertise to destroy surplus SALW and ammunition. In addition to its 15 objectives for safe, secure, and sustainable through-life conventional ammunition management, the OEWG suggested ten steps to further implementation of its global framework. Although the objectives included strong language on strengthening gender mainstreaming and cooperation with civil society and other stakeholders, some of the steps for implementation treat civil society as mere observers. To be fully effective, here as elsewhere, civil society representatives need to be fully integrated in implementation efforts. In implementing the OEWG commitments, civil society has an important role in disseminating and explaining the outcomes to relevant stakeholders such as parliamentarians. Civil society also needs to be included in the development of national targets and national plans on ammunition management and destruction.

¹⁷ BMS8 outcome document, Preamble, para. 19

¹⁸ Open Ended Working Group Objective 10(b)(iii)

ISSUE 3. Moving forward on developing national targets for implementation of the UNPoA

Discussion and results

In the BMS8 outcome document, States are encouraged to establish voluntary national and regional targets for UNPoA and ITI implementation. These targets are a way to develop capacities and policies that take into account data collection needs and address all stages in the life cycle of SALW and ammunition. The aim of developing national priorities and targets is to “coordinate the implementation of strategies, stakeholder involvement and the allocation of resources”¹⁹ as well as to submit national reports to be shared with other States through the UN and to mobilize resources, including for international assistance.²⁰ Participating States at BMS8 also agreed to ensure that national and regional implementation of the UNPoA and ITI are integrated into their efforts to implement the targets set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs), especially SDG 16.²¹

Setting such targets for both SALW and their ammunition would allow States to supplement existing, more general goals with more specific measurable objectives they have developed. This could increase the ongoing commitment of stakeholders in each country to the resulting activities and their success, while also improving accountability. In each case, the objectives need to be consistent with commitments to implement the UNPoA and ITI. When States develop specific targets for UNPoA implementation, it can deepen their connection to the UNPoA process, because these targets will be linked to each State’s specific concerns and needs.

The BMS8 outcome document also recognizes existing regional road maps to address the illicit trade in small arms²² and encourages States to consider the establishment of further regional and/or subregional action plans “which could include goals and targets, measurable objectives and concrete indicators with a view to addressing the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in a comprehensive, sustainable and coordinated manner in the respective regions.”²³

States participating in BMS7 laid the groundwork for this effort by committing themselves to develop specific targets for UNPoA and ITI implementation.²⁴

Next steps

One useful way forward is for civil society organizations in each country and region to work with the relevant national authorities to support the development of individual national and regional action plans that identify the UNPoA and ITI measures most relevant to their contexts. The plans should aim to cover the full life cycle of SALW and be feasible and based on accurate data. Development and coordination of the plans should fully include women and other underrepresented groups, especially those who are at greater risk of SALW violence.

¹⁹ BMS8 outcome document, para. 24

²⁰ These issues are covered extensively in the BMS8 outcome document. See for example BMS8 outcome document, paras. 26, 27, 41, 43, and 44.

²¹ BMS8 outcome document, para. 49. For additional information on the Sustainable Development Goals, see [here](#).

²² BMS8 outcome document, para. 41

²³ BMS8 outcome document, para. 44

²⁴ For example, see BMS7 outcome document, paras. 50, 51, 52, and 116

IANSA's pilot project, "Building Civil Society Dialogues with Governments to Promote National PoA Priorities," is a potential model for this effort. As part of the project, twelve national facilitators from civil society organizations in Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean used a variety of methods to contact officials, as well as a range of formats for the resulting activities. Facilitators worked to convey three main messages:

"The benefits of setting national targets to supplement existing, more general goals with more specific goals that are developed based on the country's specific contexts.

The benefits of a dialogue with civil society as organizations with grassroots expertise and experience on the effects of small arms-related violence.

The benefits of gathering relevant stakeholders ahead of BMS8 to explore and establish synergies in the national context between international and regional instruments on small arms regulation with the aim to develop national priorities for the next phase of UNPoA implementation."²⁵



During BMS8, IANSA held a side event on "Setting voluntary national targets to support the implementation of the PoA: A way forward," with participation from national dialogue facilitators and delegates from Cameroon, Costa Rica and the Philippines.

²⁵ Teresa Dybeck, "[Building Civil Society Dialogues with Governments to Promote National PoA Priorities](#)," IANSA, October 2022.

ISSUE 4. Ensuring attention to synergies among instruments that are critical to preventing SALW proliferation, violence, and harm.

Discussion and results

Over more than two decades, considerable work has been undertaken by the international community to regulate the legal trade and to take measures to address the illicit trade in SALW. Instead of looking at each of these instruments in isolation, States are recognizing the importance of taking advantage of the complementary and mutually reinforcing provisions in the relevant instruments covering SALW. This includes the UNPoA, the ITI, the Firearms Protocol, the ATT, and sub-regional and regional instruments such as the Economic Community of West African States Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, their Ammunition and other Related Materials (ECOWAS Convention) and the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials (CIFTA).

In an important step forward, the BMS8 outcome document recognizes that the various global, regional, and sub-regional instruments are not independent. Taken together, the instruments can be significantly more effective than if they are implemented in isolation. States have undertaken to:

“Take into account, where applicable, complementarities between the Programme of Action and the International Tracing Instrument and other relevant instruments to which a State is a Party, in particular regional and sub-regional instruments in order to enhance, as appropriate, coordination at the national level on the implementation of the Programme of Action and the International Tracing Instrument, including with regard to national reporting.”²⁶

Maximizing complementarities with respect to international cooperation is also included in the BMS8 outcome document. States have agreed “to establish or strengthen subregional, regional, cross-regional and global cooperation... in order to... improve the dialogue between donors and recipients, avoid duplications and maximize complementarities and expertise.”²⁷ The positive references in the BMS8 outcome document recognize that the implementation of complementary provisions in the instruments covering SALW can be significantly more effective than if States implement each of the instruments separately.

Next steps

Civil society has been centrally involved in encouraging States to recognize complementary and mutually reinforcing provisions in all relevant instruments covering SALW, including the UNPoA, the ITI, the UN Firearms Protocol, the ATT, and other sub-regional, regional, and global instruments. Recognizing such complementarities is a means of improving the effectiveness of national efforts to prevent the illicit trade in SALW and international cooperation and assistance programs to that end. Civil society and States should continue to promote legislative, policy, and practical measures to control all aspects of the SALW trade that maximize the complementary provisions of the instruments, including with respect to transparency and enforcement measures and prohibitions on particular types of transfers. To contribute most effectively to these processes, civil society must be fully integrated into relevant discussions and included in all UNPoA conferences and meetings.

²⁶ BMS8 outcome document, para. 23

²⁷ BMS8 outcome document, para. 94

ISSUE 5. Increasing attention to the need for sustainable international cooperation and assistance in implementing the UNPoA and the ITI

Discussion and results

Fully implementing the UNPoA and ITI involves tasks with a wide range of costs and complexity. Some of these tasks, such as developing more robust administrative systems for authorizing, monitoring, tracking, and tracing arms imports and exports, may involve larger costs in countries that lack the necessary infrastructure.

Many of the countries that urgently need to address the illicit trade in SALW lack the financial resources to do so effectively. This concern is extensively reflected in the BMS8 outcome document. In general, States resolved to “promote international cooperation and assistance responding to the needs and implementation priorities identified in national action plans and regional road-maps, where applicable.”²⁸ and to “encourage States in a position to do so, to support the funding of assistance projects over several years to allow for sustained capacity building and multi-stakeholder coordination that includes civil society.”²⁹ While international cooperation and assistance has been an important component of the UNPoA since its inception, sustained and longer-term support is required to fully achieve the goals of the UNPoA.

In addition, States resolved to explore means for enhancing international cooperation in the tracing of illicit SALW³⁰ and to:

“reinforce in a concrete manner international cooperation and assistance regarding the use of new technologies for marking, record-keeping and tracing, where available, to strengthen the implementation of the International Tracing Instrument in light of recent developments in small arms and light weapons manufacturing, technology and design, in particular polymer and modular weapons, and firearms produced using 3D printing.”³¹

The BMS8 outcome document commits States to “encourage the promotion of good practices and lessons learned of modalities and procedures for international cooperation and assistance to ensure the effective implementation of the UNPoA,” including through the mainstreaming of a gender perspective and youth considerations³² and encourages:

“the conduct of voluntary, nationally determined baseline assessments, where appropriate, as a joint undertaking of requesting and donor States as mutually agreed, in the context of requests for international cooperation and assistance that include financial assistance and the transfer of technology under the Programme of Action and the International Tracing Instrument, with a view to addressing needs in a comprehensive and sustainable manner, preserving and strengthening national ownership of requesting States and fostering confidence between all stakeholders.”³³

²⁸ BMS8 outcome document, para. 85

²⁹ BMS8 outcome document, para. 86

³⁰ BMS8 outcome document, para. 66

³¹ BMS8 outcome document, para. 73

³² BMS8 outcome document, para. 79

³³ BMS8 outcome document, para. 89

Next steps

Looking forward to RevCon4, international assistance needs to be broadened beyond meeting the needs of States to address civil society's need for sustained support for its work. This is an issue that is generally overlooked in discussions on the UNPoA. When civil society organizations have sufficient human and financial resources, they are able to assist with UNPoA implementation in varied ways, including by providing expert analysis and assistance with public information and education programs on the illicit trade in SALW at local, national, and global levels.

It is important that civil society organizations can engage constructively with national authorities and donor officials to explore ways that they can assist in building capacity and multi-stakeholder coordination to strengthen the implementation of the UNPoA and the ITI.

ISSUE 6. Setting a robust agenda and mandate for RevCon4

Discussion and results

At the Third Review Conference on the UNPoA (RevCon3) held in 2018, States agreed to convene a fourth Review Conference on the UNPoA (RevCon4), to be held in June 2024. Review Conferences are held every six years and are important to the UNPoA process because they are designed to allow for more extensive policy discussions than at the Biennial Meetings of States on the UNPoA. Review conferences can strengthen the UNPoA and address new challenges identified by Member States, such as post-shipment controls and new technologies affecting the UNPoA. In this regard, RevCon4 offers a critically important opportunity to propose programs and actions to improve the overall implementation of the UNPoA and the ITI.

The mandate for RevCon4 was included in the annual omnibus resolution adopted in 2022 by the UN General Assembly on "The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects."³⁴ The resolution was agreed without a vote in both the UN First Committee and the General Assembly.

The BMS8 outcome document indicated several agenda items for RevCon4.

- The submission in a timely manner of voluntary national reports on implementation in order to assess UNPoA and ITI implementation, build confidence, promote transparency, and identify needs and opportunities for international cooperation and assistance.³⁵
- To consider a comprehensive analysis by the UN Secretariat of progress in trends, challenges, and opportunities in UNPoA and ITI implementation, with the findings and recommendations to be circulated prior to RevCon4.³⁶

³⁴ "[The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects](#)" A/RES/77/71, adopted by the UN General Assembly without a vote on 7 December 2022.

³⁵ BMS8 outcome document, para. 27

³⁶ BMS8 outcome document, para. 60

- To discuss UN Secretariat proposals for the establishment of an open-ended technical expert group to assess recent developments in small arms and light weapons manufacturing, technology and design, modular and polymer weapons and 3D printing.³⁷
- To discuss options for enhancing international assistance frameworks to support UNPoA implementation, including the establishment of a structured procedure within the UN Secretariat to process requests for assistance.³⁸

These agenda items for RevCon4 were reiterated in the 2022 omnibus resolution in the General Assembly. This is a significant improvement from the 2017 omnibus resolution that preceded RevCon3, which merely welcomed the early appointment of France as President of the conference and gave the conference dates, rather than focusing on substantive provisions.³⁹

Next steps

It is important to propose additional agenda items for RevCon4 that address substantive unresolved and neglected issues that will strengthen the implementation of principles and provisions set out in the UNPoA and the ITI. Such agenda items could be raised at the UN General Assembly's First Committee in fall 2023 and then again at the RevCon4 preparatory meeting in February 2024.

RevCon4 gives States an opportunity to assess the effectiveness of national target setting as a method to prevent the illicit trade in SALW in all its aspects; review the needs of States for international assistance programs; report on their implementation of their commitments on gender; and build capacities for collection and destruction of illicit, obsolete, and surplus SALW and their ammunition. RevCon4 also provides the opportunity to strengthen international and regional cooperation, including through implementing measures that take advantage of synergies with other relevant instruments.

At RevCon4, States can also take advantage of the opportunity to counter the negative effects of new technologies, while seeking ways to use other technologies to improve SALW controls. States could proceed with the establishment of an open-ended technical expert group to focus on new developments in SALW manufacturing, technology, and design, as proposed in the BMS8 outcome document. Rapid advances in SALW technology such as polymer weapons design may facilitate their proliferation and misuse. At the same time, however, new monitoring technologies could also be used to more effectively track and control SALW throughout the transfer process and their entire life cycle.

³⁷ BMS8 outcome document, para. 75

³⁸ BMS8 outcome document, para. 87

³⁹ "The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects" A/RES/72/57, adopted by the UN General Assembly without a vote on 4 December 2022, Preamble and para. 7.

III. LOOKING FORWARD

Opportunities and challenges for RevCon4

RevCon4 is an opportunity to make progress on issues that have already been identified, while also pointing out new and neglected issues that must be addressed.

Four preliminary framing points for IANSA's work in preparation for RevCon4 are:

- The responsibility of States to implement strict controls on the transfer and use of SALW, including meeting their commitments under regional and international instruments and increasing their efforts to help end the proliferation and misuse of SALW and their ammunition.
- Implementing specific measures to regulate the SALW trade, including national laws and regulations that reflect States' international legal obligations.
- Building public and political support for the UNPoA, including work to change cultural norms and attitudes toward armed violence.
- Transparency in reporting and international cooperation and assistance, including measures to decrease secrecy around the trade in SALW.

Some of these framing points have elements in common with the six key issues analyzed above; others provide new perspectives on UNPoA implementation.⁴⁰

IV. ISSUES THAT NEED ADDITIONAL ANALYSIS AND ADVOCACY

Overarching issues that have not been adequately discussed in the content of the UNPoA include the promotion of cultures of peace, due diligence responsibilities of businesses, and international standards to prevent police gun violence.

Promotion of cultures of peace

The "promotion of cultures of peace" provisions in the UNPoA have never been fully addressed. The UNPoA refers to the promotion of cultures of peace:

"Determined to reduce the human suffering caused by the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects and to enhance the respect for life and the dignity of the human person through the promotion of a culture of peace"⁴¹

⁴⁰ For additional details and related policy proposals, see IANSA [Global Week of Action Campaign Public Advocacy Brief](#), 2023. IANSA is developing further materials during the lead up to the PrepCom in February 2024 and RevCon4 in June 2024 to explain the importance of these and other key issues.

⁴¹ Programme of Action, Preamble, para. 4

“To promote dialogue and a culture of peace by encouraging, as appropriate, education and public awareness programmes on the problems of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects, involving all sectors of society.”⁴²

During RevCon4, States should be encouraged to submit proposals that are designed to promote dialogue and a culture of peace. This could include supporting comprehensive education and public awareness programs on the problems of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects. These programs are likely to be strongest if they involve all sectors of society, as reflected in the text above from the Programme of Action.

If the necessary resources are made available, civil society can be an important partner in States’ efforts to put this commitment into practice. Many civil society organizations are already involved in education and public awareness programs, but financial constraints frequently limit the scope and duration of these efforts.

Due diligence responsibilities of businesses

During RevCon4, attention should be paid to the fact that States and businesses have existing legal obligations and responsibilities to create effective due diligence procedures applicable to the international transfer of SALW and ammunition. IANSA’s fact sheet on “Due Diligence Responsibilities of Businesses Involved in Small Arms and Light Weapons” addresses these issues:⁴³

“It is generally understood that businesses do not have direct international human rights legal obligations. However, over the past several decades, work has been done to create global human rights standards for businesses. The frameworks that have developed distinguish between the State *duty* to protect against business related human rights abuse, and the *responsibility* of companies to respect human rights.”

“The challenge for states and businesses is in applying both their existing legal obligations and meeting their responsibilities to create effective due diligence procedures. States could consider introducing mandatory due diligence obligations for the arms trade sector. However, even in the absence of such state regulation, SALW businesses should act in accordance with international corporate responsibilities frameworks and implement comprehensive human rights due diligence processes.”

International standards to prevent police gun violence

In past BMS meetings for the UNPoA and annual Conferences of States Parties for the ATT, discussions have focused predominantly on the use of weapons in armed conflict. This neglects the fact that many types of armed violence, such as gender-based violence, take place in both conflict and non-conflict situations. Non-conflict settings include violence involving armed gangs and organized crime and may also include police violations of some of the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force by Law Enforcement Officials. Civil society should work to help ensure that police gun violence is criminalized and prevented.

⁴² Programme of Action, Section II, para. 41

⁴³ Markus Fahlbusch, Fact Sheet: “[Due Diligence Responsibilities of Businesses Involved in Small Arms and Light Weapons](#),” IANSA and the [International Peace Information Service](#) (IPIS), September 2023.

IANSA's briefing paper, "International Standards to Prevent Police Gun Violence," directly addresses these issues and offers five key recommendations:

"All governments and police authorities should promote, publicise, incorporate in law and practice UN standards for law enforcement officials including the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officers and the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials. Police training should emphasise human rights and alternatives to the use of firearms.

States should explicitly include the promotion and adherence to these UN standards on the use of force and firearms in the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Manufacture and Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons In All Its Aspects when it is reviewed by States in 2024.

Bilateral and institutional donors, including agencies of the United Nations, should require national and local authorities to adhere to these UN standards in all international assistance projects that they fund, particularly where such projects involve community safety.

All states should assess recipient states' adherence to UN standards when considering whether to export or supply arms to forces or agencies involved in law enforcement, and should not supply firearms, ammunition or other weapons that present an unwarranted risk of injury or abuse.

Civil society organizations and individuals should help promote awareness of and strict adherence to these UN principles by governments and law enforcement organisations."⁴⁴

This briefing paper was prepared for IANSA by Dr. Natalie Goldring. It draws from and builds on previous IANSA publications written by Dr. Goldring and others, including IANSA's BMS8 Quick Guide (2022). Editorial contributions were made by Dr. Brian Wood and Clare da Silva. It was designed by Emily Callsen.



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⁴⁴ Dr. Brian Wood, "[International Standards to Prevent Police Gun Violence](#)," IANSA, July 2023.