

IANSA Factsheet

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# Civil Society Perspectives on the Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management



A photograph of controlled destruction of obsolete conventional ammunition in Ghana in November 2022 by the Mines Advisory Group.

## Introduction

Over the last two decades civil society organisations and many like-minded States have been especially concerned about the effective regulation of conventional ammunition from the licit market.<sup>1</sup> It spans from controls on manufacturing to international trading and transport, and national stockpile storage and distribution. Particular attention regarding security has been given to preventing the diversion of such ammunition into illegal hands and into illicit uses, especially to commit organised crimes and atrocities. In addition, States have increasingly addressed safety concerns that arise from the improper handling of some national stocks stored under poor environmental conditions that have led to ongoing accidental explosions resulting in the loss of lives and property.

While small arms and light weapons (SALW) can remain functional for decades even if their storage conditions are inadequate, that does not apply to their ammunition.<sup>2</sup> For SALW there are solutions whereby parts and components can be removed from a weapon and replaced when needed to maintain its operability. However, such solutions do not apply to ammunition which has a much shorter shelf-life than the weapons themselves. In order for authorized personnel to use a particular SALW lawfully, the suitable ammunition must not only be available and accounted for but must be safely and securely stored.

This factsheet addresses the issue of conventional ammunition management and makes some recommendations for civil society organizations (CSOs) on how to engage with the Global Framework for through-life conventional ammunition management.

## What are the main problems related to controlling conventional ammunition?

Conventional ammunition, commonly used in military, law enforcement, and civilian contexts, poses several challenges across environmental, health, safety, and geopolitical fields. To remain safe, ammunition has to be controlled throughout its life-cycle from production to transfer, transport, storage use and destruction. This requires comprehensive national legislations, effective measures and practices, regulations, administration, and enforcement that meet international and regional standards such as contained in the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), the UN Firearms Protocol, UN sanctions, the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines (IATG), as well as for instance international transport regulations for dangerous goods, and various regional instruments.

A particular challenge stems from the innate chemistry of ammunition which necessitates rigorous transport and storage procedures to prevent explosions that can have disastrous humanitarian consequences, including death, injury, displacement, other societal disruption, and environmental damage. In addition, the diversion of ammunition to illicit markets and unauthorized users is known to be a catalyst for armed conflict, violent and organized crime, and terrorism. Moreover, diverted ammunition is increasingly used to assemble improvised explosive devices.

The unique challenges posed by conventional ammunition management that lie in their explosive nature and tendency towards instability can be seen from the incidence of unplanned explosions. Between 1979 and 2024, more than 100 countries in all regions of the world have experienced over 670

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<sup>1</sup> See for example the UNLIREC Background paper (2023): The Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management and its Application in Latin America and the Caribbean. [https://unlirec.org/wp-content/uploads/Background-paper\\_Global-Framework-Ammunition\\_Full.pdf](https://unlirec.org/wp-content/uploads/Background-paper_Global-Framework-Ammunition_Full.pdf), or the Small Arms Survey (2008): "Conventional Ammunition in Surplus: A Reference Guide. <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-Conventional-Ammunition-in-Surplus-Book.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The focus of this paper is on ammunition that is related to the use of small arms and light weapons (SALW). For more information on landmines, cluster bombs, unexploded ordinance (UXO), and explosive remnants of war (ERW), please see information produced by for example the Mines Advisory Group (MAG), [www.maginternational.org](http://www.maginternational.org).

unplanned explosions at munition [sites](#)<sup>3</sup> (UEMS) due to poorly managed ammunition, with disastrous humanitarian and socio-economic consequences. According to the Norwegian People's Aid, of the 242 incidents of UEMS in recent times (between 2010 and 2019), 39 occurred in Africa, 16 in the Americas, 116 in Asia, 70 in Europe and 1 in Oceania.<sup>4</sup> Taken together, these consequences demonstrate the very serious security and safety challenges posed by inadequately managed stockpiles.

Through-life conventional ammunition management could be understood as the comprehensive, cradle-to-grave approach to handling conventional ammunition throughout its entire lifecycle – from design and acquisition through storage, use, trade, transport, maintenance, and ultimately disposal. It is a systematic process intended to ensure safety, efficiency, accountability, and environmental compliance across all phases.

Many countries face financial and/or technical constraints in implementing through-life ammunition management systems. In addition, corruption in the arms trade can undermine control measures and facilitate illegal activities also related to the use of ammunition. This can be compounded by variations in national regulations that can lead to loopholes in the control systems. Strengthening national controls on all aspects of the transfer and trade in ammunition and implementing effective through-life conventional ammunition management practices are vital for promoting global security and preventing violent crime and conflict. Collaborative efforts among nations, supported by international frameworks, can enhance these efforts.

### **What is the Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management?**

To address the problems associated with conventional ammunition, the United Nations adopted in December 2023 a new international instrument, the Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management<sup>5</sup> (GFA). The GFA is a comprehensive instrument that covers all types of conventional ammunition from the small calibre to the largest, at every stage of the ammunition life cycle from manufacture, through pre-transfer, transfer, relocation and transport, stockpiling and recovery, to their eventual usage and /or disposal. As a set of political commitments, the GFA contains 15 objectives, and 85 concrete measures aimed at tackling security and safety risks associated with conventional ammunition management and to prevent their diversion, illicit trafficking, and unplanned explosion at munition sites.

The GFA rests upon and reaffirms Member States' respect for international law, including applicable international humanitarian law, and the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, including the sovereign equality of States, territorial integrity, the peaceful resolution of international disputes, and non-intervention in the internal matters of States. On the basis that States in the GFA reaffirm "the inherent right of all States on individual or collective self-defence in accordance with Article 52 of the Charter of the United Nations".<sup>6</sup>

At its core, the GFA addresses:

- "Existing gaps" in control frameworks to achieve a "discernible reduction in the risks and impacts arising from the ineffective through-life management of conventional ammunition around the world, extending from the point of manufacture, through pre-transfer, transfer, relocation and transport, stockpiling and recovery, to their eventual use or disposal," and
- "the destruction caused by unplanned explosions of conventional ammunition at ammunition sites, which claim thousands of lives, disrupt communities' livelihoods, and can

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<sup>3</sup> Small Arms Survey Database, [Unplanned Explosions at Munitions Sites \(UEMS\)](#).

<sup>4</sup> Norwegian People's Aid, Mine Action and Disarmament: [Stockpile Destruction](#).

<sup>5</sup> [United Nations Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management](#).

<sup>6</sup> [United Nations Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management](#).

generate severe humanitarian, human rights, socioeconomic, environmental and public health impacts.”

The GFA touches upon several risks posed by the diversion of conventional ammunition, including to criminals, organized criminal groups and terrorists, as well as their trafficking into illicit markets, their contribution to the intensity and duration of armed conflict, violations of human rights and humanitarian law and armed violence, including gender-based violence around the world. It further notes that the diversion and illicit trafficking of conventional ammunition poses a risk to peace, security, stability and sustainable development at national, subregional, regional and global levels.

The GFA encourages the establishment, by States, of the technical capabilities to perform adequate, systematic and sustainable surveillance of conventional ammunition in national stockpiles, “as appropriate and consistent with national law”, including through the provision and receipt of international cooperation and assistance. This means the establishment of suitable information management systems, the development of guidance on good practices including within the framework of the IATG in a transparent manner under the UN SaferGuard programme, and the development of lower-technology surveillance measures in conjunction with industry and research institutions that are tailored for temporary use in low-capacity and conflict-affected environments.

Whilst the framework is about conventional ammunition management, it does not define conventional ammunition. The IATG defines conventional ammunition as a complete device, (e.g. missile, shell, mine, demolition store etc.) charged with explosives, propellants, pyrotechnics or initiating composition for use in connection with offence, or defence, training, or non-operational purposes, including those parts of weapons systems containing explosives. (c.f. munition).<sup>7</sup>

### **International initiatives prior to the Global Framework**

Measures to prevent and detect the illicit trafficking and diversion of firearms ammunition were included in the 2001 UN Firearms Protocol, an instrument that supplements the UN Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime. A majority of States are now parties to the Protocol and Convention.<sup>8</sup> However, despite the efforts of civil society, States did not agree to include measures on ammunition in the 2001 UN Programme of Action on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons (UN PoA) until the Third Review Conference of the UN PoA in 2018, as captured in page 11 paragraph 18 of the outcome document.<sup>9</sup> Ammunition was also omitted from the UN Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA), a transparency mechanism established in 1991 to report on exports and imports of major conventional weapons. States decided to include reporting on SALW as a “voluntary background information”, but they have not yet agreed to include SALW ammunition as an actual reporting category.

In 2009, the UN General Assembly, in considering steps to enhance cooperation with regard to the safety and security of conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus, requested the UN system to develop guidelines for appropriate controls by States to eliminate the risk of explosions, pollution and diversions, and to improve ammunition management including by destruction of surpluses.<sup>10</sup>

The ‘safety’ of ammunition storage refers to practices and guidelines designed to ensure the safe handling, storage, and transport of ammunition, as well as to prevent accidental explosions, injuries, and other hazards. It focuses on preventing accidental discharge and injuries. Essentially, safety is about protecting individuals from harm. Safe storage practices include keeping firearms unloaded,

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<sup>7</sup> IATG 01.40, para. 3.56, 2021

<sup>8</sup> UNODC, [Firearms Protocol](#)

<sup>9</sup> <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1637331?ln=en&v=pdf> (A/CONF.192/2018/RC/3)

<sup>10</sup> UN General Assembly resolution [A/RES/63/61](#) of 12 January 2009

locked, and separate from ammunition. This minimizes the risk of accidental shootings, suicides, and intentional misuse. Additional safety measures include storing ammunition in the right environmental conditions such as airtight containers away from heat, humidity, and sunlight.

Ensuring the 'security' of ammunition storage on the other hand refers to the result of measures taken to prevent the theft of explosive ordnance, entry by unauthorised persons into explosive storage areas, and acts of malfeasance, such as sabotage.<sup>11</sup> Secure storage includes using locked storage solutions (safes, lock boxes) with secure locking mechanisms (keys, combinations, biometric technology, etc.) and in some cases by providing 24-hour personnel guarding the storage facility. Key aspects of secure ammunition storage include means to solid storage procedures, proper packaging and handling, temperature and humidity control (the right environmental conditions), separating ammunition storage from that of firearms, regular inspection and maintenance procedures, as well as generally the compliance with regulations.

As a result, in 2011, the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines (IATG) were developed and the UN SaferGuard Programme<sup>12</sup> was established. The UN SaferGuard Programme contains several online modules including self-assessment tools, IATG Online Digital Tool, IATG Comprehensive Training Package, guidance on risk management, and technical and demolition calculators. Pursuant to the request of the General Assembly contained in its resolution 72/55 adopted by consensus in 2017, the first meeting of the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on conventional ammunition was held in 2020–2021. It adopted a comprehensive approach and explored the full range of safety and security measures in every stage of "through-life" ammunition management. The GGE also put forward practical, concrete recommendations for a comprehensive framework on conventional ammunition. Welcoming the report of the GGE, the UN General Assembly decided to establish an open-ended working group (OEWG) to elaborate a set of political commitments as a new global framework that would address existing gaps in through-life ammunition management.<sup>13</sup>

Regarding the security aspects of the through-life management of conventional ammunition, the General Assembly in its resolution 78/47 of 6 December 2023 requested the Secretary General to develop voluntary operational guidelines related to the framework of the IATG under the UN SaferGuard programme, with the assistance of technical experts from interested States. The General Assembly also decided to establish a new standing dedicated fellowship training programme on through-life conventional ammunition management particularly in developing countries.<sup>14</sup>

In the Final Document of the OEWG, States recognize the contribution of relevant stakeholders, including CSOs, academia, research institutions and industry, in their efforts to inform and promote safe, secure and sustainable through-life conventional ammunition management with their States.

The Global Framework was also acknowledged in the outcome document of the Fourth Review Conference of the UN PoA (RevCon4), where States noted:

"We take note of the adoption of the Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management, a voluntary, separate and distinct cooperative framework that contains a set of political commitments for strengthening through-life conventional ammunition management, which States with a view to doing so may wish to consider in their efforts to implement relevant provisions of the Programme of Action."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> [International Ammunition Technical Guidelines](#), IATG 09.10 of March 2021.

<sup>12</sup> [United Nations SaferGuard](#).

<sup>13</sup> [United Nations Open-ended Working Group on Conventional Ammunition](#)

<sup>14</sup> UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/78/47 of 6 December 2023

<sup>15</sup> A/CONF.192/2024/RC/3, Part I, para 43



## **How can States cooperate to implement the Global Framework?**

All States can participate in the process to enhance international cooperation and assistance. It has been recognized that international cooperation and assistance, including those directed to civil society actors, are needed to contribute to reducing the dual risks arising from ineffective through-life conventional ammunition management, including unplanned conventional ammunition explosions and the diversion and illicit trafficking of ammunition.

The GFA contains a dedicated follow-up and review process which consists of a Preparatory Meeting of States in June 2025 and the First Meeting of States (MS1) in the summer of 2027. The MS1 will decide on the convening of regular subsequent MSs to review implementation, as well as governmental Technical Experts Meetings to address particular issues and themes.

States have been invited to submit an initial overview of their national implementation efforts of the GFA in 2026. Similar to the example of the UN PoA national reporting, this information exchange is likely to prove central in ensuring successful outcomes of the MS1 as well as future meetings. To facilitate implementation of the GFA, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) together with the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), Conflict Armament Research (CAR) and the Ammunition Management Advisory Team (AMAT) of the Geneva Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) have developed a voluntary implementation guide to support States in their implementation of the GFA which is expected to be launched at the margins of the Preparatory Meeting in the summer of 2025.

## **What can civil society do to support the implementation of the GFA?**

In the Global Framework as well as in the RevCon4 outcome document, States have recognized the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships towards forming a better understanding of challenges to effective through-life conventional ammunition management. Civil society actors can play an important and constructive role in this by supporting the comprehensive, effective and universal implementation of the Global Framework. This can be done for example by promoting awareness of the problems, and the practical, operational ideas and measures recommended in international standards regarding the security aspects as well as the safety aspects. CSOs can also organise outreach through meetings, media and publications, and undertake actions to assist national authorities that are implementing the GFA, as well as warning of malpractices that undermine its implementation where reliable and verifiable data is available.

CSOs should strive as far as possible for constructive dialogue with national authorities and parliaments. Such exchanges could enhance understanding on the political commitments contained in the GFA and promote practical approaches to implementation and facilitate the sharing of information related to the diversion and trafficking of conventional ammunition.

CSOs could also support efforts to raise awareness and understanding of the voluntary initial overview of national implementation efforts that States are encouraged to submit in 2026, thereby contributing to broad participation and helping to ensure comprehensive and informed submissions. The meetings in 2025 and in 2027 will also require substantive preparations at the national, regional and global levels. With adequate financial and technical resources civil society organisations can play a constructive role in these efforts. CSO support can take a number of forms from promoting gender mainstreaming and youth engagement to increasing awareness and commitment to understanding the objectives and implementation of key measures to improve safety and security of conventional ammunition as recommended by the GFA.

CSO involvement and support will be especially important in areas where they may sometimes have unique knowledge and experience. For instance, CSOs can help create awareness amongst communities of the dangers related to diversion of conventional ammunition to unauthorized recipients, including criminals, organized criminal groups and terrorists. This could conceivably include reporting instances to the authorities of the criminal use of ammunition in the manufacture or trade of improvised explosive devices where a CSO comes across reliable, relevant and objective information. More generally, where it can be reasonably assumed, a CSO may raise concerns about the contribution of ammunition to fuel armed conflict, armed violence, including gender-based armed violence, violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, and wider socioeconomic, environmental and public health impacts.

Effective implementation of the GFA will also require – as noted in Objective 14 – full, equal, and meaningful participation of women in decision-making and implementation processes related to through-life conventional ammunition management. States participating in the process have also already encouraged mainstreaming a gender perspective into policy and practice to address the differential impacts of the safety and security aspects of conventional ammunition on women, men, girls and boys. CSOs may be well placed to promote such policies and practices as well as to encourage understanding of such impacts amongst, and engagement with, youth and marginalised communities.

### **Recommendations for CSO support**

**In order to help promote safe, secure, and sustainable through-life conventional ammunition management, civil society organisations can consider the following:**

1. Learn about the dangers associated with SALW ammunition, how they should be managed in your country or region in line with the Global Framework and other international standards, and what problems may be giving rise to inadequate ammunition management and types of risk that might cause harm in the future.
2. Enhance knowledge and awareness of the GFA and – where appropriate – to promote adherence to relevant international standards, guidelines and good practices on safe, secure and sustainable through-life conventional ammunition management, such as the IATG in your State(s).
3. Specifically promote the high standards to prohibit transfers of ammunition that would violate, or be used to violate, international law for example as set out in international humanitarian law, transnational criminal law, and in Article 6 of the Arms Trade Treaty and encourage States to “promote supply chain transparency to comprehensively minimize and mitigate the risks of diversion when authorizing conventional ammunition transfers” in line with Objective 8 of the GFA.
4. Communicate your observations, and recommendations regarding the implementation of the Global Framework to your national authorities and parliamentarians.
5. Raise awareness on the importance of the Global Framework through campaign activities and in different media including by drafting newspaper articles and by posting relevant messages on different social media platforms.
6. Share information, where appropriate, to promote data collection and analysis by competent national authorities on illicitly manufactured, diverted and trafficked conventional ammunition, and provide support, wherever possible.
7. Advocate gender mainstreaming and the full, equal, meaningful and effective participation of women, youth representatives and marginalised communities in the promotion and implementation of through-life conventional ammunition management.

### Further reading:

United Nations Programme of Action (UN PoA): Focuses on a wide range of measures and international cooperation to prevent the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons, including ammunition.

Arms Trade Treaty (ATT): Obligates State Parties to strictly regulate their international trade in conventional arms and ammunition, prohibiting transfers that would be used for atrocities and requiring exporting countries to assess the potential for arms to be used for human rights violations, war crimes, transnational organised crime, terrorism or to escalate conflict.

ISO Standards: The International Organization for Standardization has developed guidelines for ammunition management to ensure safety and security.

*On through-Life Conventional Ammunition Management:*

UNODA, UNIDIR, CAR, AMAT-GICHD 2025: "Implementing the Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management: A Voluntary Guide". (Forthcoming)

Gender Equality Network for Small Arms Control (GENSAC): Practical Guide for Civil Society: Gender and Multi-Stakeholder Partnership in the Global Framework for Through-Life Conventional Ammunition Management" (Forthcoming)

Ashcroft, Mark 2022: "A traditional approach to munition life management", in *Energetics Science and Technology: An Integrated Approach*, Chapter 9, IOP Publishing Ltd.

BICC (Bonn International Centre for Conversion), 2005: *SALW Basics – Recognizing SALW and Ammunition*, TRESA. Available online at [https://www.bicc.de/Publikationen/SALW\\_Basics-Recognizing\\_SALW\\_Ammunition\\_TRAINEE.pdf-dr771](https://www.bicc.de/Publikationen/SALW_Basics-Recognizing_SALW_Ammunition_TRAINEE.pdf-dr771).

Carapic, Jovana, etc al. 2018: "A Practical Guide to Life-cycle Management of Ammunition", *Small Arms Survey Handbook*, Small Arms Survey: Geneva.

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United Nations, 2008: Problems arising from the accumulation of conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus, A/RES/62/61.

United Nations, 2009: Problems arising from the accumulation of conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus, A/RES/63/61

United Nations, 2023: Through-life conventional ammunition management: resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, A/RES/78/47.

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