

IANSA Briefing Paper

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The Role of Civil Society in the UN Global Framework for Through-Life Conventional Ammunition Management (GFA) Processes

I. Introduction

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have been pivotal in the formulation of and campaigning for the adoption of several global and regional arms control instruments¹. They have played and continue to play strategic roles at the national, regional and global levels in the adoption and implementation of many of these instruments² through various forms of advocacy and collaboration³ with national authorities⁴, parliamentarians, diplomats and other stakeholders⁵. *Would CSOs be able to replicate past successes in the implementation of the Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management (GFA)?*

Past successes in the implementation of other arms control instruments and treaties⁶ include engaging officials on their commitment to certain instruments and the need to take concrete steps in implementation⁷, supporting states to review and harmonize their arms control legislation and regulations, providing capacity for national authorities in their reporting obligations⁸, supporting and building capacities of border control and law enforcement agencies to implement global and regional arms control instruments among many others.

This paper seeks to explore how CSOs can play a positive role in supporting the implementation of the Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management (GFA). It highlights the importance of CSOs involvement in the implementation of other conventional arms control instruments whilst pointing to some initiatives available to support stakeholders in enhancing their implementation of the Framework.

Background to CSOs Engagement on the topic of through-life conventional ammunition management

Many CSOs around the world are concerned about the risk posed by the diversion of conventional ammunition of all calibers to unauthorized recipients including criminals, organized criminal groups and terrorists. Similarly, CSO members of the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) from all regions of the world are gravely concerned about the trafficking of conventional ammunition and their precursors into illicit markets, including their subsequent use in the manufacture of improvised explosive devices, as well as their use in the intensity of and duration of armed conflict, armed violence, organized crime, and serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law, including gender-based armed violence. The diversion of conventional ammunition into the illicit market and into the hands of unauthorized recipients, as well as patterns of misuse of such ammunition poses a huge threat to peace, security, stability and sustainable development at all levels.⁹

The destruction caused by unplanned explosion of conventional ammunition at munition sites and the disruption to communities, livelihoods, their humanitarian consequences, their negative impacts on human rights, public health, environmental and socioeconomic developments as well as the destruction of infrastructure and conventional ammunition needed by States for lawful defense and security

¹ <https://iansa.org/the-programme-of-action-on-small-arms-incomplete-without-the-inclusion-of-ammunition-2017/>

² <https://iansa.org/how-an-arms-trade-treaty-can-help-prevent-gun-violence-report-2011/>

³ https://iansa.org/global-week-of-action-against-gun-violence/ANSA-2017-Week-of-Action-report_web

⁴ <https://mailchi.mp/iansa/july-9-international-gun-destruction-day-3460733>

⁵ https://iansa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Policy-Brief_ICTP-Gender-and-SALW-Sierra-Leone.pdf

⁶ <https://iansa.org/regional-workshop-civil-society-advocacy-issues-on-small-arms-control-in-africa-15-october-2024/>

⁷ <https://iansa.org/international-gun-destruction-day/>

⁸ <https://iansa.org/key-aspects-of-small-arms-and-light-weapons-trade-controls-under-ecowas-and-complimentary-international-instruments-october-2024/>

⁹ <https://docs.un.org/en/A/78/111>.

purposes¹⁰ are all matters of serious concern on which CSOs would like to support States, regional and international organizations to address.

CSOs have demonstrated their keen interest through participation in and support for the Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management (GFA) right. CSPs have done this from the beginning of the processes leading to adoption of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 72/55¹¹ in December 2017. Such efforts include continuously calling on States to include the regulation of ammunition in discussions on the United Nations Program of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (UNPoA).¹² Building on the adoption of the UN Firearms Protocol in 2001,¹³ members of CSOs have campaigned vigorously for the inclusion of ammunition provisions¹⁴ in various arms control instruments such as the Arms Trade Treaty and have engaged like-minded states to support provisions on ammunition in various UNPoA outcome documents at conferences. It should however be noted these calls and campaigns continued to face stiff opposition from some skeptical states and therefore CSOs could not help achieving the necessary consensus from all states to include ammunition regulation in the UNPoA. It was therefore a major breakthrough when resolution 72/55 was adopted by the UN General Assembly. CSOs, in keeping with their long-standing commitment to ammunition regulation, continued to offer support to the work of the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) pursuant to UN General Assembly Resolution 61/72¹⁵ of September, 2021, and participated in the meetings of the Open-Ended Working Group on Conventional Ammunition (OEWG) pursuant to resolution 76/233¹⁶, providing useful information resources and background information to enhance the work of the OEWG.¹⁷

IANSA coordinated the participation and statements of CSOs in the various OEWG meetings enabling them to make proposals to be included in the outcome document.¹⁸ Likewise in June 2025, CSOs, coordinated by IANSA actively and meaningfully participated in the maiden preparatory meeting of the GFA¹⁹ held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

Brief History of the GFA

The idea for a Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management emerged because of numerous challenges and opposition faced by some states and CSOs in their attempts to address problems arising from the accumulation of conventional ammunition stockpiles. As indicated above, the regulation of ammunition transfers was also repeatedly being raised by states and CSOs in deliberations to strengthen the implementation of the UNPoA especially at the Review Conferences and at the Biennial Meetings of States (BMS). The opposition of some states to the inclusion of ammunition in the outcome documents of the BMS continued until eventually at the Third Review Conference (RevCon3) in 2018 ammunition was allowed to be mentioned in the outcome document.²⁰ However, even that

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/72/55>.

¹² <https://iansa.org/the-programme-of-action-on-small-arms-incomplete-without-the-inclusion-of-ammunition-2017/>

¹³ Protocol Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition supplementing the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (Firearms Protocol), 2001

¹⁴ <https://iansa.org/the-programme-of-action-on-small-arms-why-ammunition-must-be-included-june-2021/>

¹⁵ <https://docs.un.org/en/A/76/324>.

¹⁶ <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/76/233>.

¹⁷ <https://iansa.org/second-substantive-session-of-the-open-ended-working-group-on-conventional-ammunition/>

¹⁸ <https://iansa.org/group-of-governmental-experts-on-problems-arising-from-the-accumulation-of-conventional-ammunition-stockpiles-in-surplus/>

¹⁹ <https://iansa.org/preparatory-meeting-of-states-un-global-framework-for-through-life-conventional-ammunition-management-2025/#~:text=>

²⁰ <https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/salw/revcon2018/documents/final-report.pdf>

mention of ammunition in the RevCon3 outcome document was resisted by a few states until the issue was subjected to a vote in which the overwhelming majority of States finally recorded their support.²¹

In the official UNPoA process, decision-making by “consensus” has been interpreted as meaning actual unanimity which has then allowed a single state or less than a handful of states to block progress if they so choose. The UNPoA falls under the General Assembly’s responsibility, and in UN General Assembly deliberations, decision-making by “consensus” involves every effort being made to reach an agreement. A resolution can be adopted by consensus where no state will actively oppose it, or it can be eventually adopted by a vote of the majority even if one or a handful of states remain opposed. At the RevCon3, the inability to reach unanimity on the inclusion of a reference to ammunition in the draft outcome document eventually resulted in the conference president allowing all participating states to vote on paragraphs (16 and 18) of the draft document.²² In the end, the small group of skeptical states were not allowed to determine the outcome of text in RevCon3. A vote was also used by the conference president during the BMS7 deliberations in 2021. However, at both Rev3 and the BMS7 the outcome documents were unanimously adopted.

Given the continued diversion and misuse of ammunition across many countries, and the failure by States to boldly confront and address the ammunition question through the UNPoA Biennial Meetings of States (BMS), concerned states explored other means at the international level of dealing with the issue of ammunition regulation and control. Those efforts culminated in the UN General Assembly Resolution 72/55 which was adopted on 4th December 2017²³ to establish a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) to address the “problems arising from the accumulation of conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus through 2018 and 2019.” The resolution emanated from the UN First Committee report A/72/409 for that same year.²⁴ Subsequent to the report of the GGE, the General Assembly established an open-ended working group (OEWG) pursuant to resolution 76/233.²⁵ This working group was mandated to elaborate a set of political commitments as a new global framework to address existing gaps in through-life ammunition management.

The outcome of the work of the OEWG was expected to be part of a comprehensive framework to support safe, secure and sustainable through-life ammunition management at the national, subregional, regional and global levels and should be considered on voluntary basis.²⁶

The open-ended working group (OEWG), which was originally scheduled to hold three meetings ended up with four meetings due to the need to address and accommodate all the divergent issues and to be able to incorporate diverse opinions, concerns and suggestions from different stakeholders as much as possible and where feasible. Three meetings were held in New York and one in Geneva. The first substantive meeting was held in New York from 23 to 27 May 2022, the second in was held from 15 to 19 August 2022 in Geneva, the third substantive meeting went back to New York between 13 to 17 February 2023 whilst the final meeting took place from 5 to 9 June 2023 at the UN headquarters in New York.²⁷ At its final meeting on 9 June 2023, the OEWG adopted its report without a vote but with the Russian Federation and Belarus dissociating themselves from the report. The OEWG report was presented to the General Assembly at its seventy-eighth session held on 4 December 2023 and the Global Framework for Through-

²¹ https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament%20fora/salw/revcon2018/documents/29June_PP18.pdf

²² <https://iansa.org/seventh-biennial-meeting-of-states-on-the-united-nations-programme-of-action-on-small-arms/>

²³ <https://docs.un.org/en/A/res/72/55#:~:text=ammunition>

²⁴ <https://docs.un.org/A/72/409>.

²⁵ <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/76/233>.

²⁶ <https://docs.un.org/A/78/111>.

²⁷ Ibid.

life Conventional Ammunition Management was adopted through UN General Assembly Resolution 78/47.²⁸

The GFA is a set of political commitments by states containing 15 objectives and 85 concrete measures aimed at tackling security and safety risks associated with conventional ammunition management and to prevent the diversion and illicit trafficking of ammunition, as well as unplanned explosions at munition sites. The GFA is a comprehensive international instrument that covers all types of conventional ammunition from small caliber 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.²⁹

II. What Does Civil Society Bring to the GFA Implementation?

The role played by civil society in the adoption and implementation of other arms control instruments has been highlighted in the opening page of this paper. It is however important to reiterate that CSOs play a role far beyond campaigning, lobbying and providing valuable research materials for the passage and adoption of various arms control instruments globally and regionally. CSOs have strategically supported the efforts of States, national authorities and regional organizations in implementing these instruments³⁰. The roles played by different types of CSOs range from the provision of technical support for national officials in drafting, harmonizing and adopting legislation, and regulatory frameworks³¹, to also providing capacity for border control and law enforcement personnel in particular for less-capacitated states in implementing arms control instruments at the borders and within the states³².

In these ways CSOs continue to support and help build capacities of competent national authorities and national focal agencies in their reporting obligations to the various regional and global instruments³³ such as the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA), the UNPoA, the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), the Firearms Protocol as well as a plethora of global and regional instruments. In some countries CSOs also provide technical support to state agencies in the area of arms marking, identification, tracing, and destruction of obsolete, confiscated and seized weapons. Additionally, CSOs offer support for national authorities in the identification and demolition of unstable and obsolete ammunition.

Also, a vitally important part of the process is the CSO campaigns, publications, educational activities, and efforts to sensitize and raise awareness among government officials regarding the implementation of states' obligations arising from the various arms control instruments which their governments have signed on to at the regional and global levels. Some CSOs also make efforts to hold government agencies accountable for the actions and inactions of officials in this respect. Other crucial activities of CSOs include awareness raising among the population to help them understand the issues at stake in relevant contexts relating to the arms and ammunition trade, their ineffective regulation and management and the dangers that poses to communities and the functioning of a state.

In supporting states in such ways to implement the relevant instruments relating to the regulation of ammunition, some civil society actors have tried to raise funds for CSO activities whilst providing expertise

²⁸ <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/78/47>.

²⁹ <https://iansa.org/civil-society-perspectives-on-the-global-framework-for-through-life-conventional-ammunition-management-june-2025/>.

³⁰ <https://iansa.org/key-aspects-of-small-arms-and-light-weapons-trade-controls-under-ecowas-and-complimentary-international-instruments-october-2024/>

³¹ https://www.bicc.de/Publikationen//SALW_Control_Training_Manual_for_West_Africa_Part_1_01.pdf

³² <https://www.smallarmscommission.gov.gh/the-small-arms-commission-trains-officers-in-weapons-and-ammunition-identification-and-tracing/>

³³ <https://iansa.org/regional-workshop-civil-society-advocacy-issues-on-small-arms-control-in-africa-15-october-2024/>

in monitoring, evaluating and accounting for project activities and the responsible use of funds. It is important to note that these activities by CSOs continue to serve as 'blueprint' for support for implementation and should be replicated in the GFA implementation in partnership with States, Regional and Global organizations.

III. How Civil Society Can Support the Implementation of the GFA

Just like the role played by CSOs in many other international arms control instruments, CSOs are eager to facilitate the effective implementation of the GFA on the understanding that its successful implementation would contribute to the safety and security of civilian populations particularly in states that have been ravaged by wars, armed conflicts and violent crimes. In such contexts, CSOs advocacy has tried to encourage states to address, among other things, ineffective controls on ammunition transfers, weak ammunition manufacturing regulations and poor physical security and stockpile management (PSSM).

With regard to small arms and light weapon ammunition, IANSA will endeavor to mobilize its diverse civil society membership to support the implementation of the GFA in various ways as indicated below.

CSOs will continue to raise awareness to make the GFA known to governments, officials, diplomats, parliamentarians, technocrats, security, law enforcement and border control personnel, the media, as well as the general populace. This is very critical because awareness of the existence of the instrument by these stakeholders would be a great step forward toward its implementation. By this, IANSA intends to support NGOs to engage their national officials and all the relevant stakeholders to raise awareness and popularize the GFA.

IANSA will continue to research and publish papers on the GFA, including on its implementation successes and challenges, highlighting actions required to address key problems, to help ensure a stronger and robust GFA.

IANSA will continue to encourage its members to remind states of their reporting obligations in the GFA process and where necessary support states that require assistance in their GFA reporting.

IANSA will encourage CSOs to continue supporting the efforts of states to build capacities of security agencies, border control officials, competent national authorities, as well as national focal agencies and points of contact on the GFA. This will focus on steps and measures required for implementation and how to effectively report on their implementation activities.

IANSA will help spread awareness on how technical organizations in civil society continue to support states in managing their stockpiles, enhancing the physical security of ammunition and providing the critical resources in transporting and demolition of unstable and obsolete ammunition especially in less capacitated states.

IANSA will continue to mobilize, coordinate and support the participation of CSO actors in global and regional conversation and conferences to ensure that not just minority voices are heard but also those on the ground who are practically experiencing the devastating consequences of poorly managed conventional ammunition stockpiles as well as their ineffective transfer regulations and controls.

IV. How Can Civil Society Collaborate with States, Regional and International Organizations Regarding the Implementation of the GFA?

To be successful the plans and strategies to implement GFA need to include the role of CSOs as important elements. This was already envisaged in drafting the text of the GFA. In paragraph 9 of the preamble, states agreed the following:

*“recognizing also the contribution of relevant stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations and civil society, academia, research institutions and industry, in supporting efforts to inform and promote safe, secure and sustainable through-life conventional ammunition management, and recognizing further the importance of these multi-stakeholder partnerships towards forming a better understanding of challenges to effective through-life conventional ammunition management”.*³⁴

The Framework further encourages cooperation and information sharing with relevant stakeholders including CSOs on issues related diversion and trafficking in its objective 12b(ii) which agreed that, “where beneficial, feasible and consistent with national and international law, encourage closer cooperation and information exchange with relevant stakeholders including non-governmental organizations and civil society, academia, research institutions and industry on issues related to conventional ammunition diversion and trafficking”³⁵.

Importantly, the Framework, in its objective 15, encourages cooperation with relevant stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations and civil society, academia, research institutions and industry to enhance through-life conventional ammunition management.³⁶ It encourages dialogue and exchange of good practices in technological, policy and normative development in through-life conventional ammunition management in objective 15a(ii). The Framework further highlights the important contribution of Civil Society and other relevant stakeholders to training initiatives and research on the development of systems that contribute to the more effective through-life conventional ammunition management, therefore encouraging states and other stakeholders to collaborate with CSOs in these areas as spelt out objective 15b(i).

In view of these understandings, CSOs expect to engage in more active and enhanced cooperation and collaboration with states, regional and global organizations in the implementation of the GFA. This will need to include support for CSOs requesting assistance to provide relevant support, as well as the establishment of funding mechanisms dedicated to the GFA implementation. Such cooperation is spelt out in the various objectives and the preamble of the Framework to enhance the role of CSOs in supporting the GFA implementation. Thankfully, states have recognized the important role of CSOs in the GFA process as evident in objective 15 of the Framework. This was further demonstrated by the UNODA and Germany by supporting the participation of civil society actors in the first preparatory meeting of the GFA held in June 2025 at the UN Headquarters in New York.

In global conversations relating to the GFA implementation, an example of dedicated funds to support CSOs participation/engagement was initiated in “the 2025 Effective CSO Engagement in the GFA process” sponsored by UNODA through financial contributions of Germany. It is expected that this initiative will enhance the work of CSOs internationally and enable their greater and meaningful participation by CSO actors, especially those operating to support the GFA in the Global South and in less capacitated states.

³⁴ <https://docs.un.org/en/A/78/111>.

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid.

V. Civil Society Recommendations to States

States are primarily responsible for the implementation of the GFA and therefore it is important for states to encourage each other, especially those within the same regional blocs, to adopt and initiate concrete steps towards the implementation of the GFA. In this regard, states should highlight the benefits associated with effective GFA implementation such as improving conventional ammunition safety which would prevent and mitigate the danger of unplanned explosions, enhance physical security of stockpiles.

IANSA urges states to do the following:

1. States should exercise due diligence in applying the principles and rules in international and regional instruments regarding transfer controls effectively and to adopt measures to prevent unauthorized recipients including criminals, organized criminal groups, and terrorist networks gaining access to usable cached, abandoned and uncleared conventional ammunition and its energetic material as set out in objective 10 of the GFA³⁷
2. States should continuously promote supply-chain transparency in accordance with objective 8 of the GFA and to comprehensively minimize and mitigate the risk of diversion when authoring conventional ammunition transfers.³⁸
3. States should take all the necessary measures to mitigate risk of post-transfer conventional ammunition diversion and ensure the issuance of and compliance with end-user certificates as well as other functionally equivalent documents in accordance with bilaterally agreed documents and clauses.
4. States should take urgent steps to review and harmonize their legislation to include relevant provisions on through-life conventional ammunition management where feasible and as needed, to strengthen their implementation. CSOs would be ready to support states which require assistance in this area as has been done in many of the arms control instruments.
5. States should share information voluntarily at the subregional, regional and the global levels on conventional ammunition diversion and their illicit trafficking as envisaged in objective 12 of the GFA to enhance implementation and bolster confidence among states.³⁹
6. In order to inform discussions of the First Meeting of States of the GFA to be held in 2027, States are encouraged to take the necessary steps to provide their initial overview in 2026 including steps taken towards implementation of the GFA, highlighting their achievements, challenges and relevant gaps identified through the implementation.⁴⁰

³⁷ <https://docs.un.org/en/A/78/111>

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ <https://docs.un.org/en/A/78/111>.

⁴⁰ <https://unidir.org/publication/implementing-the-global-framework-for-through-life-conventional-ammunition-management-a-voluntary-guide/>

Further Reading

Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management text:
<https://docs.un.org/en/A/78/111>

The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) text: https://thearmstradetreaty.org/hyper-images/file/ATT_English/ATT_English.pdf?templateId=137253

Civil Society Perspectives on the Global Framework for Through-Life Conventional Ammunition Management, IANSA (June 2025) (<https://iansa.org/civil-society-perspectives-on-the-global-framework-for-through-life-conventional-ammunition-management-june-2025/>)

United Nations Program of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (UN PoA) text:
<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/447095?v=pdf>

Focuses on a wide range of measures and international cooperation to prevent the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons, including ammunition.

Problems arising from the accumulation of conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus (Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 4 December 2017)
<https://docs.un.org/en/A/res/72/55#:~:text=ammunition>

United Nations, 2023: Through-life conventional ammunition management: resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, A/RES/78/47: <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/78/47>

Conceptualizing the Global Assistance Mechanism, under the UN SaferGuard program, to support the implementation of the Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management ([https://docs-library.unoda.org/Global_Framework_for_Through-life_Conventional_Ammunition_Management_Preparatory_Meeting_of_States_\(2025\)/Secretariat_Paper_Conceptualizing_the_Global_Assistance_Mechanism.pdf](https://docs-library.unoda.org/Global_Framework_for_Through-life_Conventional_Ammunition_Management_Preparatory_Meeting_of_States_(2025)/Secretariat_Paper_Conceptualizing_the_Global_Assistance_Mechanism.pdf))

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