Statements by Civil Society for Working Group on Universalisation

Please find below statements prepared by various civil society organisations from the Control Arms coalition for presentation at the Working Group on Universalisation of the ATT, May 31. These statements only briefly touch upon the work civil society has been doing in each region. We would be happy to provide more information should States be interested.

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Co-chairs and delegates, good morning,

The region of the Middle East and North Africa is currently witnessing many wars and conflicts: The civil wars in Syria and Yemen are still going on, without any substantial peace efforts in sight. In Iraq, the different sects haven’t been able to reach sustainable peace. In Libya, different tribes continue to fight each other. Last, but not least, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has never been solved.

The civil wars particularly in Syria and Yemen have led to a big humanitarian crisis, producing the highest numbers of refugees since World War II.

Non-state actors such as the Islamic State are active in Libya, Iraq and Syria and contribute to destabilize the entire region. ISIS a powerful non-state actor and can be so only because it is well equipped with weapons.

The MENA region - Middle East and North Africa - is the region with the highest density of weapons in the world, and currently it is the region with the highest numbers of wars and conflicts being fought. These wars and conflicts would not take place as they're happening now if arms transfers were much more controlled and if the influx of weapons into these countries could be significantly reduced.

Due to this extremely challenging situation that the MENA region is currently going through, Arab governments seem to have other priorities and worries than signing or ratifying the Arms Trade Treaty. However, an effective implementation of the ATT for the Middle East and North Africa could contribute to the efforts of increasing stability in the region.

The start of the ATT process within the Arab region was quite positive: In 2014, 12 Arab states voted positively for ATT (among them Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti and Mauritania). Then, progress slowed down and only four Arab states signed the ATT: UAE, Libya, Bahrein, Lebanon, as well as League of Arab States members Comoros, and Djibouti. So far only one LAS member state – Mauritania – ratified the ATT in 2016.

Arab governments seem to have reservations regarding the Arms Trade Treaty and this makes universalization efforts in this region very difficult. Civil society continues to raise awareness about the benefits of the Arms Trade Treaty to make this region more peaceful and stable. Civil society also continues to lobby for universalization efforts in this region:

Last May, my organization Permanent Peace Movement from Lebanon held a joint event with the League of Arab States in Cairo to promote international instruments of arms control among Arab policy makers. We also made country visits to Tunisia, Jordan and Lebanon to promote the ATT. We also worked with MENA countries at international meetings. For example, we held a side event about the relevance of arms control instruments in the MENA region in New York during the UNPoA meeting last June. In this respect, I would like to thank the German Foreign Office for having supported our work for many years and continuous to do so.

However, the challenges are immense, but stability and peace can only be reached when less weapons are available to warring parties.

Thank you.

Ends.
ASIA

Thank you, Co-Chairs.

As an additional from what my colleague in the civil society mentioned.

Over the last year, Nonviolence International Southeast Asia have conducted regional consultations and a series of capacity building workshops for parliament, government officials and implementing institutions to engage governments in Southeast Asia and work with them towards universalization and implementation; engagements from the ASEAN Secretariat, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam in SEA and we worked with our partner, Centre for Armed Violence Reduction to engage the Pacific Islands, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Together with Control Arms, we also had exchanges with other regions, bringing together experts from Australia and New Zealand, as far as the Caribbean to promote best practices.

We are thankful to Japan through the Conventional Arms Division and ICRC for the consistent support as resource speakers for all our activities.

Nonviolence International Southeast Asia has continuously worked with governments in the region. Despite challenges of getting government approvals to apply, together with the Philippines, we put forward an application to the ATT VTF.

Nonviolence International Southeast Asia is thankful to the ATT 3CP Presidency for letting us organize consultations between the presidency and NGOs in Indonesia and Thailand. We are also honored to be part of UNDP’s informal selection committee for NGO sponsorship programme. We welcome the development of these inclusive processes that give space for CSOs/NGOs to participate and input in future ATT-related activities and events.

Though considered a relatively small region, SEA has a population of 600 million and with ongoing peace processes in several states. The region has varied systems and levels of compliance, and would have varying needs of assistance and capacity building to ensure they meet the standards set by the ATT.

We hope that support can be put towards regional and national efforts as the implementation and universalisation efforts are concentrated in the capitals now. Active participation and engagement in the global discussions of the treaty from the states and civil society in the region should be given full support.

Ends
AMERICAS (LATIN AMERICA AND NORTH AMERICA)

Thank you chair for the opportunity to take the floor to talk about the universalisation progress in the Americas. As you know 60 per cent of the Americas are States Parties to the Treaty. We welcome the ratification of the treaty by Honduras. We would like to hear more of their experience in ratifying the treaty, as we heard from Guatemala during the February meetings.

A few countries are in the process of ratifying the ATT in the region. Canada is reviewing the ATT in parliament and we expect to see them sitting here as a State Party soon. Colombia, Brazil and Chile have also progressed towards ratification. However, after breakthrough movements, this process has stalled. In Colombia, the treaty was rejected by the Constitutional Court for a procedural issue and has returned to Congress, for what may be another two years. In Brazil, the treaty is still being debate as a thematic issue in the National Congress. It both countries it is a lengthy process to ratification, that we, civil society will continue to support. With political challenges to the treaty in these countries, it will require more engagement from both States and civil society to encourage political will.

Despite the positive steps towards ratification in the region we do face obstacles with the Bolivarian countries – Nicaragua, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and similar with Cuba from the Caribbean. These States have expressed their opposition to the ATT. We therefore call on the ATT Secretariat and the ATT president to engage in dialogue with these states, to understand their concerns and promote the value of the treaty. Ecuador, for example, has recently changed their national presidency. We see this as an opportunity to encourage Ecuador to join the treaty.

Finally, we are actively engaged with outreach activities in the region. We are disappointed to see low participation from Latin America countries during these meetings. We hope with support from States Parties in the region we can encourage more participate at the CSP. We thank those Latin American states that have been active.

Ends
AFRICA

Co-chairs,

Arms constitute a threat to peace and security worldwide. Africa, and most specifically Togo, does not escape from this sad reality, especially due to conflict and terrorist acts perpetrated by jihadist groups such as Boko Haram, AQIM and MUJWA, that illustrates the harmful effects of the use of such weapons.

The noxious use of those weapons jeopardizes peace and security, destabilizes States and hinders their sustainable development.

In Togo, the legislation on arms control started right after the 1960 independence, but existing laws and regulations need to be reinforced by a new law. The government is working on this, together with civil society. Togo has also signed and ratified the ATT.

We would like now to give an overview of the civil society projects engaged in our region:

- Advocacy projects on the implementation of the ATT; this initiative aims at raising awareness among citizens and governments about the importance of the implementation of this historical treaty and its advantages in favor of security and peace.
- A workshop related to the ATT held in Lomé on August 4th, 2016 led to the elaboration of a Guide for the implementation of the ATT, broadly shared in a digital format.
- Active participation to the drafting of the law proposal related to arms, ammunitions and other components, project adopted in March 2017.
- Active participation to the marking, rehabilitation of storage and destruction of arms and obsolete munitions in Togo, initiated by the Togolese government, with the technical assistance of UNREC. In the frame of this 2 years pilot project, a high-level workshop was held on May 18th, 2017 for the official launch, attended by civil society, technical and financial partners, and economic operators.

We would also like to present a selection of upcoming projects, for which we are in the phase of mobilizing resources, fundraising:

- Seminar to raise awareness on the ATT and on capacity building of civil and political actors.
- Editing and distribution of the Guide for the implementation of the ATT.
- Advocacy for the restoration and respect of the principles of designation of traditional leaders (the non-respect of these principles leads to intercommunity conflicts).
- Control our borders, a common project between Togo, Ghana, Benin and Burkina Faso.
- Awareness raising on the occasion of the Week of Action on SALW, June 2017

We have as partners:

- Technical partners: UNREC, GRIP, ComNat, Control Arms, WAANSA
- Financial partners: Control Arms, Oxfam GB, etc.

We are looking for financial, material and technical partners for our 2016-2021 action plan. The Togolese civil society remains mobilized to encourage and invite the stakeholders involved on the
ATT implementation, through actions such as awareness-raising on ATT or other conventions, advocacy, etc.

In Togo, civil society suffers a lot from lack of funding from national and international donors, which might be because the conflicts are not as worrying as in other countries of the sub-region. Nevertheless, it needs to be highlighted that Togo is a transit country for arms transfers and remains very exposed to conflicts, without forgetting to mention the risks linked to the porosity of borders and the proximity to countries in conflict.

These are all the reasons why we want to highlight the urge and necessity to support the actions of the Togolese civil society that is fighting against the illicit trafficking of SALW.

Thank you.

Ends.
Thank you chair for this opportunity to take the floor to discuss the process of universalisation in our respective regions.

I work for the Centre for Armed Violence Reduction, based in Australia. We work predominately with non-state parties and small island states in the Pacific, Southeast Asia and the Caribbean to raise awareness on the ATT and strengthening the capacity of states. To do this, we support and collaborate with international, regional and local organisation such as the UNRCPD, ATT-BAP, Nonviolence International Southeast Asia and CARICOM.

Given our location we have a special affection to the Pacific region. We have hosted awareness raising and capacity workshops in Fiji, Solomon Islands and PNG, a sub-regional workshop with Melanesian states in Vanuatu and assisted the UNRCPD Asia and Pacific to promote the ATT through its regional workshop in Samoa.

We are making progress – Since our workshop in Fiji, they have made steps towards preparing a Cabinet paper on the ATT, we have submitted two proposals to the VTF with Samoa and Palau, Palau has led the development of a program with the Centre to promote the ATT in the Micronesian region, and the Melanesian region is soon to host a further sub-regional workshop. There is no short of interest of the ATT in the region, particularly by the implementing agencies.

From this work, we have identified three main challenges to universalisation in the region:

1) **States want a ‘Perfect System’ before joining the ATT**: With regard to international law states in the region place high value on having the appropriate resources and capacity to implement a treaty in full compliance prior to becoming a State Party. Officials struggle to convince their political leader they will not be otherwise be called out for being non-compliant to the ATT.

There are challenges to this; first, there is a misunderstanding or low level knowledge about the obligations of the treaty to SIDs, because in fact when we have conducted gap analysis with many of the states, we have shown they already have many of the structures in place; second, they have limited human resources which slows the ratification process, ratification/acce$$

We have been encouraging states to ‘come as they are’, and fill gaps through the ATT framework. It would be heartening to hear states join this chorus and also demonstrate their open arms to states who may not have the perfect system but aim to progress with support.

2) **Political Engagement/Prioritisation**: The understanding about ATT is low in the region. Officials openly express they feel they do not have the knowledge to convince political leaders of the importance of the ATT as a priority issue.

For those states that do have awareness – the ATT is of low priority in the Pacific – We have found that if we link the ATT with the SDGs and broader sustainable development, we are able to get more individuals discussing the need to reduce or prevent illicit arms flows through the ATT.

3) **Logistics Challenge**: There is a feeling of being ‘left out of the club’. The long flights to Geneva and visa challenges prevents engagement in international meetings and without that international engagement, the ATT falls low on the priority list.

Ultimately, the biggest challenge for us is answering this question: **what is the broader value of the ATT to us?** This is particularly as small island states do not export, have small imports and have limited resources.

The Centre for Armed Violence Reduction is pleased to be working with the Government of Australia, Michael and his team, to find some answers to this question. As you have heard from my distinguished colleague from Australia, we will be developing a tool that will discuss the broader value of the ATT. A publication and accompanying infographic will demonstrate the benefits by linking the
ATT to human, national and regional security, development and the new SDGs, as well as the promotion of human rights, transparency and wider global engagement.

On a final note, in 2015 we produced an Implementation Guide that looked at the implementation of the ATT and UNPoA in the Pacific. Many States from the Pacific and broader small island states showed appreciation in this tool. Based on discussions during our workshops, we learnt that States were looking for more. The most frequent questions were: how do we develop a strong national coordinating mechanism as a small state with no exports and minimal imports, what is its responsibility and what is the role of the national point of contact in this mechanism. Subsequently, we will be producing an Implementation Guide that looks at how to implement a comprehensive national coordinating agency and the role of each stakeholder in this system from the perspective of smaller importers and transit states.

We hope these tools will inspire states to consider the broader benefits of becoming a member of the ATT family and help those members to effectively implement the treaty. Thank you.

Ends