Small arms and light weapons
International Action Network on Small Arms

Background
Small arms and light weapons (SALW) continue to be the weapons of choice in conflicts around the world, and in acts of armed violence in general. According to the Small Arms Survey, more than 500,000 people die each year as the result of armed violence. It also estimates that 70,000 of the deaths from armed violence—less than 15 percent—are the direct result of conflict. This means that a comprehensive approach to reducing deaths caused by SALW will require states to focus on armed violence rather than only conflict violence.

Key instruments that address the trade in and misuse of SALW include the UN Programme of Action to Reduce, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects (UNPoA, 2001) and its accompanying International Tracing Instrument (2005), as well as the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), which entered into force in December 2014.

Current context
The sixth Biennial Meeting of States (BMS6) on the UNPoA provided the basis for more substantive efforts to control SALW. The outcome document from the conference included welcome attention to key areas of potential synergy among the UNPoA, other activities at the UN, and other instruments dealing with arms transfers.

The outcome document was particularly strong on issues related to gender, another indication of the development of this issue over the 15 years since the adoption of the UNPoA. The issue of gender was so controversial in the original negotiation of the UNPoA that the word was not even used in the document. The BMS6 outcome document seeks synergy among various efforts by linking a recommendation on ensuring that women participate in all phases of UNPoA implementation to relevant UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. It also refers to seeking gender equality and the need for disaggregated data on gender and the illicit trade in SALW.

Another positive aspect of the outcome document was attention to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), recognizing the intrinsic connections between sustainable development and peace and security. In particular, states recognized the importance of SDG target 16.4, which includes a call for significantly reducing illicit arms flows by 2030.

The outcome document also covers the full weapons life cycle, including destruction. As states recognized in this document, destruction is the only way to ensure that weapons that are no longer needed are removed from circulation and cannot be reused.
Arguably, the biggest failing of BMS6 was that it did not deal directly with the issue of ammunition. After protracted debate, the conference adopted ambiguous language that did not use the word ammunition, but mentioned that some states may choose to apply the UNPoA’s provisions to items in addition to the list of SALW contained in the International Tracing Instrument. BMS6 also did not deal sufficiently with the Arms Trade Treaty, which has important points of synergy with the UNPoA. Another failing of BMS6 was that although non-governmental organisations provide significant substantive expertise, NGOs were still largely excluded from many sessions.

Continued implementation challenges with the UNPoA include uneven commitment to the instrument, resource constraints, and lack of infrastructure for implementation. Consensus decision-making also remains a weak link of the process.

**Recommendations**

*During First Committee, delegations should:*

- Highlight synergies between the UNPoA and the ATT;
- Put forward proposals to address transfers of ammunition within the UNPoA; and
- Focus discussions on establishing a far-reaching agenda for the 2018 UNPoA Review Conference.

*Beyond First Committee, states should:*

- Extend UNPoA provisions on recordkeeping, end-user certification, prevention of diversion, and provision for destruction of surplus weapons and weapons that remain when conflicts end to the implementation of other instruments;
- Take advantage of synergies among the instruments; e.g. states that supply weapons but have not yet joined the ATT could still apply the criteria, guidelines, and prohibitions in the Treaty to help bring more of the international trade in weapons into compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law;
- Include NGOs as full partners in the work to reduce the human costs of armed violence, include NGO representatives on national delegations, and commit to keeping negotiation sessions open at multilateral meetings so that NGOs are able to contribute more fully; and
- Focus on implementing SDGs in addition to SDG 16.4 that are related to arms control issues; e.g. pursuing SDG 5, “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls,” through the UNPoA and ATT. This would affect the substance of states’ deliberations, as well as the membership and staffing of relevant agencies, national commissions, and delegations to international meetings and negotiations.

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