Background
Small arms and light weapons (SALW) persist as the weapons of choice in many acts of armed violence. According to the Small Arms Survey—in 2016, the most recent year for which data are available—560,000 people died as the result of armed violence. Of these deaths, an estimated 18 per cent were the direct result of conflict. In order to develop a comprehensive approach to reducing deaths caused by SALW, states need to focus on armed violence as a whole, rather than limiting their efforts to addressing 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); the UN Firearms Protocol (entry into force, 2005), which supplements the UN Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime (entry into force, 2003); and the Arms Trade Treaty (entry into force, 2014).

Current context
In June 2018, the United Nations held a two-week Review Conference on the UNPoA (RevCon3). The outcome document from RevCon3, which is a negotiated final report, included numerous provisions that civil society organisations promoted and is a way to improve and expand on the original commitments of the UNPoA. Putting the outcome document’s provisions into practice could significantly improve implementation of the UNPoA.

One unusual development strengthened both the substance and process of implementing the UNPoA. At the end of RevCon3, states voted on three substantive paragraphs of the final report, rather than accepting weaker language in order to achieve consensus. In the UN context, consensus is often interpreted as unanimity, and enables a single state to block action against a majority position. Two of the paragraphs dealt with ammunition, and the third dealt with links between the UNPoA and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). One of the new paragraphs on ammunition focused on increasing attention to and analysis of surplus ammunition stockpiles. The other ammunition paragraph focused on states’ capacity to strengthen the application of the UNPoA to both small arms and ammunition, by applying lessons learned from implementing other instruments. The third paragraph stresses the need to fully implement the UNPoA and its International Tracing Instrument in order to achieve SDG 16, while also making a strong statement about the overall relationship between sustainable development and peace and security. After the three paragraphs were adopted, states
voted unanimously (with no abstentions) to adopt the final report.

**Recommendations**

*During First Committee, delegations should:*

- Work to implement RevCon3 outcomes;
- Prepare proposals to encourage states to exchange good practices on preventing, combatting, and eradicating the illicit trade in SALW and ammunition;
- Emphasise the importance of addressing pervasive SALW violence and crime, recognizing that the vast majority of deaths and injuries with SALW do not take place in situations of armed conflict;
- Focus on gender-based action to curb SALW proliferation and violence, and work to ensure women’s full participation and representation in arms control programmes and diplomatic processes; and
- Strengthen the focus on achieving SDG 16 and respecting human rights law governing the use of force.

*Beyond First Committee, states should:*

- Develop and take advantage of synergies among the UNPoA, the Firearms Protocol, and the ATT, to enhance implementation of all of these instruments;
- Utilise UNPoA provisions on recordkeeping, end-user certification, prevention of diversion, and provision for destruction of surplus and weapons and weapons that remain when conflicts end, to strengthen the implementation of other instruments;
- Apply the criteria, guidelines, and prohibitions in the ATT to help bring more of the international trade in conventional weapons into compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law;
- Include civil society as full partners in the work to reduce the human costs of armed violence, including NGO representatives on national delegations; and
- Implement SDGs in addition to SDG 16 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 will 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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2 For additional detail and recommendations on these issues, see: “Small Arms, Big Harms: A Call to Action by Civil Society on Gender and Small Arms Control,” IANSA, June 2018, https://docs.wixstatic.com/udg/bb4a5b_8c8bd0e981b54b6e8b01da205c104a3.pdf and “Gaps in Women’s Participation and Representation in the Small Arms and Light Weapons Process,” IANSA, June 2017, https://tinyurl.com/y9pcfaq.

3 See “Six key issues for the 2018 Review Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons,” IANSA, June 2018, for additional detail and recommendations on these issues: https://docs.wixstatic.com/udg/bb4a5b_a25b5d5bd3242208d0d20b9153ba5a8.pdf.