Introduction

1. MAG’s contribution to BMS6 preparation draws on over a decade of work to address illicit weapons and munitions and their negative impact on people, their human security and prospects for development.

2. Over the last ten years, MAG has seen significant growth in the number of states prioritising arms management and destruction as an issue, and also in the community of practice that has developed to support them. The contribution of international cooperation and assistance provided by expert international non-governmental organisations like MAG has also been recognised as complementing that of our civil society colleagues in research and academia.

3. Our contribution also draws on an ongoing project by the Practical Disarmament Initiative, a project by MAG that is supported by UNSCAR, the UN Trust Facility Supporting Cooperation on Arms Regulation. The initiative aims to identify and enhance good practice in considering the impact, effectiveness and sustainability of physical security and stockpile management assistance, which is undertaken to prevent diversion from stockpiles of weapons and munitions, and reduce the risk of unplanned explosions at munitions sites.

4. The UNSCAR-supported project recently brought together over 45 participants from states giving and receiving international cooperation and assistance, as well as expert NGOs and policy stakeholders. Discussions highlighted the importance of identifying and overcoming barriers to sustainability in assistance, the relevance and potential of the Sustainable Development Goals (SGD) and their associated targets and indicators, and the importance of – and need to strengthen – national ownership.

Section I: Consideration of the implementation of the Programme of Action at the national level, the regional level – including through regional and sub-regional arrangements and organisations – and at the global level, and in light of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

5. The elements included as challenges to national implementation reflect many of those encountered in locations where MAG provides assistance. We welcome particularly the inclusion of physical security and stockpile management as an activity that can reduce theft/diversion and unplanned explosions. This remains a priority issue for many states seeking assistance, particularly those experiencing fragility or emerging from recent conflict.

6. The IATG and elements of the ISACS (particularly the 5.0 series) have added value to PoA implementation and assistance, as guiding frameworks for implementation at the national level. MAG’s training and assistance packages draw on these frameworks. The incremental nature of the IATG has proved to be of particular value and enable it to add value in all locations, even when there is limited resource and capacity.

7. We note and acknowledge the role that marking and record keeping play in enabling tracing. We would also like to emphasise the critical role that marking and record keeping play in enabling the
accountable management of small arms and light weapons. Marking and record keeping are fundamental to physical security and stockpile management efforts and other work to prevent diversion. MAG feels that there is scope for identifying greater synergies between assistance aimed to support tracing, and that aim to improve accountable management and security of arms.

8. We welcome strongly the inclusion of national coordination with broader issues and processes, particularly those relating to institution building, rule of law and security sector reform. MAG believe that there is the potential for greater synergies between physical security and stockpile management programming, and assistance provided outside of arms control frameworks (considered further below).

9. MAG emphasises the importance of national ownership for successful implementation of the PoA as well as assistance relating to munition management. We consider an absence of national ownership to be a fundamental obstacle to implementation of the PoA. National ownership is strongest when it is demonstrated by allocation of national funding and capacity, when there are strong links between national commissions and the executive branch of government, and when there are clear plans that have been developed with stakeholders at the national, regional and international levels. This is also highly relevant to consideration of effective and sustainable cooperation and assistance (see further below).

10. We welcome the inclusion of references to greater cooperation at the regional or sub-regional levels. Sub-regional frameworks in the ECOWAS region in particular have provided a strong platform for dialogue around international cooperation and assistance. While acknowledging specific national and regional contexts, MAG believes that there is still greater potential for information sharing and cooperation between regions and sub-regions. Aligning regional meetings with global meetings could improve efficiency and support information sharing, including around good practice.

11. The landmark SDG, particularly target 16.4, have significant potential to support and measure efforts to address illicit small arms and light weapons. We are welcome the potential that SDG 16.4 has for measuring progress in combatting illicit small arms and light weapons at the global level.

12. We also highlight the potential that SDG 16.4 has for setting baselines and measuring progress at the national level. SDG 16.4 presents an opportunity to draw together stakeholders and existing information to act as nationally and context-specific baselines for setting and considering progress against national plans. Physical security and stockpile management assistance can also be better linked to the national implementation of SDG 16.4 as part of work to measure its effectiveness contribution and impact (see further below).
Section II: Consideration of the implementation of the International Instrument to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons, including recent developments in small arms and light weapons technology and their implications for the International Tracing Instrument

13. As outlined in reflections under Section I, we underline the importance of marking and record-keeping as fundamental elements of accountable management of weapons and munitions, in addition to their contribution to international tracing. Both should be seen as integral parts of efforts to address the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects. MAG believes there is scope of greater synergy between assistance in marking and record keeping in support of tracing, and that in support of effective and accountable stockpile management and security.

Section III: Consideration of international cooperation and assistance for the full and effective implementation of the Programme of Action and International Tracing Instrument, including capacity-building

14. MAG fully supports and underlines the importance of greater emphasis on sustainability of the outcomes and impact of cooperation and assistance programmes. This includes a focus on capacity-building as well as training. The potential sustainability of capacity-building programmes is enhanced when they include training of managers and leadership, as well as a nationally led quality assurance capacity. MAG’s partners have emphasised the importance of putting in place career structures that retain, sustain and strengthen knowledge and skills.

15. We also underline the inter-relationship between the elements of life cycle management outlined under Section III.a. Assistance programmes in one of these areas should consider their links to others, particularly at the design phase. There is potential for greater analysis of stakeholders during the design of assistance programmes. MAG has found that stakeholder analysis, when led by relevant national authorities, has strengthened national coordination and reduced duplication. In a number of cases, it has identified stakeholders beyond arms control structures (such as national finance ministries) who have a direct impact on the effectiveness and sustainability of assistance programmes.

16. MAG notes the reference to ‘involving national authorities in planning and implementation’. We emphasise the importance of national ownership as a key factor influencing effectiveness and sustainability of cooperation and assistance programmes.

17. We also note the reference to the importance of tailoring assistance to national structures and procedures, which we fully support. Stakeholder analysis in the design phase of assistance projects, referenced above, can contribute to this in a practical way.

18. Cooperation and assistance projects – particularly those relating to physical security and stockpile management – have developed clear sets of short-term project outputs (for example the number of weapons destroyed or marked, or armouries constructed or rehabilitated). While valuable, short-term outputs do not, themselves, indicate effectiveness or sustainability. Identification of barriers to sustainability should be identified at the design phase of cooperation and assistance projects, along with opportunities for complementary programming that can mitigate this. As noted above, there is
greater potential for the development of national baselines as part of the national implementation of SDG target 16.4 and the development of national small arms and light weapons action plans.

19. We note the potential for national reports to identify assistance needs and supporting matching them with resources. MAG believes that national reports can be a helpful tool for cooperation and assistance planning, but that they are not a substitute for detailed planning at the national level, including stakeholder mapping and analysis of potential duplication and sustainability. We suggest caution over use of national reports without further and more detailed assessment and dialogue at the national level.

20. We emphasise the value in longer-term planning of cooperation and assistance, including longer-term funding commitments. We also emphasise the value of longer-term national plans, developed in close dialogue with relevant national stakeholders as well as donors and potential implementing partners.

21. National plans should be considered living documents that need to be regularly updated, including on the basis of progress made, new needs identified and new potential synergies with new or existing programming that can enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of cooperation and assistance. Including financial and capacity contribution in national plans and reporting can also act as a significant confidence-building measure for enhancing levels of international cooperation and assistance.

22. Under technical and financial assistance, we also stress the importance and value of bilateral assistance and assistance provided directly through international and non-governmental organisations. This has complemented assistance provided through Trust Funds and other modalities. There has been an increase in dialogue and cooperation between different providers of assistance under various different modalities. MAG believes that further increased synergies are possible through greater cooperation and integrated contribution to the development of longer-term national plans.

23. MAG continues to underline the importance of not allocating funding earmarked for mine action to work to address small arms and light weapons.

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