Background

- The illicit flows of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) undermine security and the rule of law. They are often a factor behind the forced displacement of civilians and corresponding human rights violations. They have been referred to by former United Nations (UN) Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon as “weapons of daily destruction.”

- Global Customs has a vital role to play in combating the illicit trafficking of SALW through enforcement activity and the tracing of international SALW movements.

- WCO participated in the UNODA RevCon 3 symposium in Geneva in November 2017. This symposium examined the role of Customs in controlling both illicit trafficking of SALW, and diversion of SALW from legitimate transfers.

Current situation

- The WCO has a SALW Strategy which outlines objectives and strategic work priorities along with a tentative timeline for implementation. Following the endorsement of the SALW Strategy, the WCO Secretariat carried out a legal analysis of the provisions in the relevant international Treaties, Programmes and Conventions, along with analysis of regional instruments for the control of SALW. In addition to this, the Customs Enforcement Network (CEN) has been revised so that it is easier for members to report different types of SALW and their parts.

- A number of other activities in the implementation plan, such as a programme of regional conferences, the development of guidance and training material have not been delivered due to lack of resources. The SALW Project within WCO has no funding and activities to date have been funded using ad hoc donors. The WCO is looking for a longer term and more sustainable method of funding these activities.

- In 2016, the WCO conducted Operation Chimera, which was the first international customs counter terrorism operation of which the detection of SALW and weapons parts was a key element. A detailed analysis of the results of Operation Chimera was carried out by WCO and INTERPOL. The analysis shows that the trafficking of SALW is a global challenge and the Operational Final Report states that the WCO should look to develop a compendium of materials to support members to address capacity gaps in relation to the detection of SALW, and identify a funding stream to deliver a programme of capacity building activity.

- The WCO conducted a series of regional security seminars in 2016/17. The seminars held in East and Southern Africa, West and Central Africa, all identified the smuggling of SALW as one of the major security issues faced by Customs Administrations. Under the auspices of the RILO network, two SALW focused operations; Operation Irene in Asia
Pacific and Operation Caribbean Shield highlighted the threat in these regions and the need to develop materials to address capacity gaps in this area.

- The WCO has been able to deliver some SALW workshops when donor funding has been available. In 2017 the WCO delivered a national training workshop in Mexico and an Asia-Pacific regional SALW seminar for middle level managers in Melbourne, Australia.

- In addition, the Asia Pacific Security Project, which commenced in April 2017, has funding for a stream of SALW related enforcement activities in the Asia Pacific Region. This will allow the WCO to collate and develop training material for future technical assistance missions and operational activities in this region and elsewhere. The development of this material is at a very early stage with the goal of deployment later this year in the Asia Pacific region. It will then be available as part of a global training package on SALW.

- The WCO has engaged with National administrations, International and Regional organizations and NGO’s in the SALW sector to source material, skills, and best practices for creation a training package or programme. In November 2017, the WCO together with UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and United Kingdom Border Force (UKBF) delivered a pilot practical SALW training to Bosnian Customs in Sarajevo.

- As stated earlier, the WCO Security Programme participated in the November 2017 symposium process ahead of the upcoming third Review Conference (RevCon 3) to review Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons. Much of the discussion focused on the central role Customs plays in managing licit shipments of weapons to combat diversion and preventing illicit trafficking of weapons. This increases the need for the WCO to develop tools, instrument and guidance which can be used by its members.

Future activities

- There are a number of international firearms related capacity building initiatives or programmes that are active. The WCO does not seek to replicate them, but rather will focus on supporting them where there is common interest. The WCO has committed to support future SALW detection capacity building initiatives by its International partners, such as UNODA, the Small Arms Survey, and UNODC.

- In the next 12 months the WCO will commence delivering SALW training and capacity building in relation to SALW detection in South East Asia, under the auspices of the Asia Pacific Security Project.

- The WCO is also supporting INTERPOL SALW operational activity, such as Operation Trigger 3, and is exploring how its Information and Intelligence Centre (I2C) can complement the work of the INTERPOL I-Arms team.