



MGE Monitor
NGO reporting and analysis on the
Meeting of Government Experts on the
UN Programme of Action on small arms
9–13 May 2011



First Edition, 9 May 2011

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The MGE: Enhancing implementation of the UNPoA

Ray Acheson | Reaching Critical Will of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

From 9 to 13 May 2011, states will gather for the first time in an open-ended meeting of government experts (MGE) to address key implementation challenges and opportunities in the UN small arms process. This particular MGE will focus on the marking and tracing of small arms and light weapons, in accordance with the International Tracing Instrument that was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2005.

The chair of the MGE, Ambassador Jim McLay of New Zealand, has drafted six discussion papers on each of the key themes for the meeting:

1. Marking;
2. Record-keeping;
3. Cooperation in tracing;
4. National frameworks;
5. Regional cooperation; and
6. International assistance and capacity building.

The goal of the papers, and the MGE itself, is to support states' sharing of information, experiences, lessons learned, good practices, and challenges and opportunities, with the goal of supporting enhanced national and regional implementation of the International Tracing Instrument.

It's also an opportunity to continue building the frameworks for a more robust implementation of the UNPoA as well as for negotiation of an arms trade treaty (ATT). Many of the key topics discussed at this MGE will relate to technical considerations in the context of the UN conference for negotiating an international ATT. While the MGE will relate specifically to small arms and light weapons, there are clear connections to be made between the best practices and modes of cooperation highlighted here and what could be promoted in an ATT.

The MGE Monitor is produced by Global Action to Prevent War, Reaching Critical Will of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Oxfam International, and the International Action Network on Small Arms and Light Weapons. More reporting and analysis can be found on their joint blog at <http://attmonitor.posterous.com> and on Twitter at #armstreaty.

Implementation of the ATT: Key to end the nightmare of armed violence

Folade Mutota | Caribbean Coalition for Development and the Reduction of Armed Violence

In the Caribbean, we have not fully counted the economic or social costs of armed violence. But what we do know is that the violence that has invaded our lives is overwhelming us daily, creating a blur on our prospects for sustainable peace and development.

The imperatives are clear. A comprehensive arms trade treaty must be based on the pillars of international human rights law, international humanitarian law, and sustainable development. There is a nexus between security and development and the principles of the United Nations Charter are there to guide us in determining how we ensure that we do not trade one for the other.

In my country, Trinidad and Tobago, when mothers lament the demise of their sons, they say, “Somebody’s missing, somebody’s missing here today.” For every “somebody” who is missing as a result of gun violence, there is an increased likelihood that women and families will be plunged into poverty. When somebody is missing, it adds to the burden of care which women are expected to perform in families and communities, and reduces women’s chances for higher education and career advancement. Gender-based violence is becoming more prevalent, fuelled in part by easy access to firearms and unequal gender relations. It is unconscionable therefore, to continue to rely on women to nurture families, yet not protect women from violence in this treaty.

The scope of this treaty must reflect the dynamism and the promise of our time. It must also acknowledge that whilst

technology holds promise, its misuse can have devastating effects on human development. This treaty gives governments the opportunity to protect their population from human error or corruption, by ensuring that technology, as well as the parts and components specially designed or modified for use in conventional arms, are embedded in the arms trade treaty.

The annual trade in arms is well beyond the national budgets of all CARICOM member states, and many in Latin America. In order to efficiently respond to the current nightmare of armed violence international cooperation and assistance is vital to ensure implementation of the arms trade treaty.

CDRAV’s most recent proposal on implementation of the ATT posits that implementation in its entirety, including the resourcing, development cooperation, challenges, monitoring and evaluation, must be thoroughly dissected looking forward. In order to do so, harmonization of laws is required in CARICOM member states. We also propose a national implementation unit, and an independent monitoring authority, which can perhaps operate at the regional level. This structure will work in harmony with an international monitoring agency.

The scourge of gun violence does not only take the life of the deceased person. It wipes out families as hope and happiness is replaced by despair and anger. Anger left unresolved will ultimately return to haunt us, and therein lies the recurrent cost to the state. The treaty will be incomplete for the people of Latin America and the Caribbean if these issues are not addressed.

Compatibility mode

Dr. Robert Zuber | Global Action to Prevent War

The opening of the Meeting of Government Experts on Small Arms has attracted a surprising degree of interest from NGOs worldwide. Some of this interest might well be a function of confusion about the nature of the week's meetings. This is clearly not an advocacy-oriented gathering like the arms trade treaty preparatory committee, but a meeting primarily devoted to technical questions on marking, tracing, and record keeping towards the end goal of more effectively curbing illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

But much NGO interest is generated by our strong desire to encourage diplomats and their experts to push forward on the important technical dimensions necessary to establish fully the UN's Programme of Action. While most of the NGOs attending the MGE are not experts in tracing protocols or related information technologies, they are sensitive to the multiple compatibilities that must be integrated successfully if this meeting is to result in actionable outcomes that can help us follow in a reliable manner the indirect, even inscrutable, pathways that so many small arms take throughout their life cycle.

Some of the compatibility needs are obvious. For instance, there is a need to closely bundle tracing concerns with technologies for robust marking and record keeping. And there is wisdom in keeping capacity assistance front and center as an incentive for states to bring their weapons stockpiles and purchases under a common regulatory framework. The Chair's 'Thematic Discussion Papers' recognize that states will have different operational technologies and 'cultures' of transparency for keeping track of weapons and communicating data, but also underscore the

necessity of ensuring that such 'cultures' can effectively and meaningfully 'talk' with each other. Much like modern computing systems, there must be strict insistence by experts that preferred ITI tracing protocols and other modes adopted for marking and record-keeping are readily accessible by—and compatible with—existing and evolving systems of weapons identification by individual states.

The challenges of this MGE are formidable. Unless experts are able to establish reliable, compatible protocols and technologies for identifying and tracing the movement of small arms, levels of trust in the full implementation of the UNPoA are likely to lag. But the Chair's papers set an even higher bar for trust, one grounded in a sharing of best practices and experiences, the advice and assistance of INTERPOL and other agencies, the creation of reliable national focal points, and the willingness of states to share capacity with other states facing capacity deficits.

In these larger dimensions of confidence-building, NGOs continue to play important roles, even those not in possession of highly regarded technical expertise. Prior to the next UNPoA Review Conference in 2012, we would do well to invest in the relationships and capacities that can clear a path for accelerated movement on the UNPoA.