



# SMALL ARMS MONITOR

Civil society perspectives on the meeting of governmental  
experts of the UN Programme of Action on small arms

1–5 June 2015



Reaching Critical Will

2 June 2015  
Vol. 7, No. 2

## IN THIS ISSUE

- 1 | Editorial
- 3 | Side event report:  
Launch of *Small  
Arms Survey  
2015*
- 4 | What YouTube  
taught us about  
SALW

The *Small Arms Monitor* is produced by the Reaching Critical Will programme of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) during meetings related to the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons.

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## EDITORIAL: "NEW" CHALLENGES, OR OLD ONES?

Ray Acheson | *Reaching Critical Will of WILPF*

On the opening day of the second meeting of government experts (MGE2) on small arms and light weapons (SALW), experts and delegates discussed new and emerging technologies that have implications for effective marking, record-keeping, and tracing of weapons. Presentations, prepared remarks, and an interactive exchange indicated a shared understanding of the challenges related to new and emerging technologies, but disagreement over the best way forward. Some suggested upgrading marking technologies—which some pointed out is costly and technically challenging; other suggested adjusting the UN Programme of Action (UNPoA) and International Tracing Instrument (ITI) to accommodate new weapon technologies—which some felt was not possible or desirable. But very few states raised concerns about the crux of the issue: addressing production of SALW in the first place.

Concerns raised about emerging technologies included the increasing use of polymer components in SALW, the development of

modular weapon systems, and the production of guns using 3D printing. All of these are posing challenges for the marking and thus tracing of weapons.

- Polymer components, made mostly from plastics or other synthetic materials, are difficult to mark and it is easier to remove any marks that are made. Entire frames of weapons are now made from polymer. These weapons are cheaper to produce and thus buy, and they are lighter to carry, making them ideal for trafficking.
- Modular weapons are those with parts and components that can be changed by the manufacturer, in an armory workshop, or on the field by a user. For example, a rifle can have interchangeable barrels with different lengths. This raises questions about which component of the weapon should be marked; or, if multiple components are marked, which one needs to be traced.

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*Editorial, continued*

- 3D printing of guns poses potential concerns regarding mass availability and lack of control over unlicensed production. These weapons are difficult to trace, have proved challenging to forensic techniques, and easily destroyed.

The ITI is very specific about what kind of marks are required—they must be on an exposed surface, conspicuous to the naked eye, easily recognisable, readable, durable, etc. All three of these emerging technologies present challenges to fulfilling these requirements. There are no international standards for the marking of such weapons, which as a working paper by Austria, Belgium, and Germany argues, “risks creating a situation where the tracing of these weapons will be increasingly hampered and even become impossible.”

The experts giving presentations on Monday, as well as the working paper from Austria, Belgium, and Germany, offered some specific recommendations for overcoming these challenges or adapting marking, record-keeping, and tracing practices. Some experts and delegations even suggested amending the ITI to adapt to these new technologies—though South Africa raised several procedural questions around doing so.

But as some delegations such as Costa Rica, Kenya, Mali, and Sierra Leone pointed out, trying to keep up with the new technologies necessary to effectively mark and trace weapons these types of emerging weapon technologies is increasingly expensive. In many cases, the equipment available to mark weapons upon import is already out of date or broken down. Obtaining new equipment and training people to use it is a significant financial investment for countries that have little assistance for such undertakings. And the technologies themselves make marking upon import even more difficult. For example, as a working paper from CARICOM points out, polymer weapons might be marked with a metal tag inserted during production, but these are often “not large enough to accommodate post-manufacture marking.”

Should the approach to these challenges really be to “keep up” with emerging technologies? Or could a more effective, human security-driven approach be to focus on the point of manufacture and production?

The UNPoA and its framework is about dealing with the illicit trafficking in SALW. It is designed to deal with the fact that the world is awash in weapons and that many of these weapons are being traded illegally. The Arms Trade Treaty is about dealing with the so-called legal trade in weapons and ensuring “responsibility” for this trade. While the effective implementation of these

instruments is crucial, they are insufficient to deal with the crux of the problem: weapons are still being produced en masse. And those making weapons, and selling them, have only one motivation: profit.

Sierra Leone challenged this reality on Monday, saying the weapons manufacturers are working for money; that they want to produce SALW at the lowest possible cost. But, the delegate pointed out, weapons are lethal. At the very least, they must be manufactured in a way that officials can at least keep account of them properly. Either we need to rewrite our instruments like the ITI to meet the needs of manufacturers, Sierra Leone declared, or manufacturers need to rethink the products they are making.

This is the most compelling solution offered during yesterday’s meeting. While technical fixes might be necessary to deal with this issue in the short-term, the long-term solution must be much more comprehensive. It must get to the heart of the problem, which is the manufacture and sale of instruments of death and destruction for profit. This is the same challenge we have always had with SALW and that we will continue to have until the issue of production is addressed head on. •

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### 2 JUNE 2015 | Vol. 7, No. 2

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*The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom or the Reaching Critical Will programme.*



SIDE EVENT REPORT: LAUNCH OF *SMALL ARMS SURVEY 2015*

Ghazal Rahmanpanah | PeaceWomen of WILPF

On 1 June, the Permanent Missions of Switzerland and Small Arms Survey hosted a side event launching the new edition of the Small Arms Survey yearbook. The event featured Ambassador Paul Seger, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the UN; Anna Alvazzi del Frate, SAS Senior Researcher; Khristopher Carlson, SAS Senior Researcher; and Glenn McDonald, SAS Senior Researcher and Yearbook Coordinator.

*Small Arms Survey 2015: Weapons and the World* examines the role of weapons and armed violence in humanity's appropriation of the earth's wildlife and mineral riches, particularly in Africa, where the poaching of elephants and rhinos is becoming increasingly militarised, and near resource extraction sites around the world. Speakers presented key findings from the 2015 yearbook.

The event began with introductory remarks by Amb. Seger, who explained that the SAS Yearbook's aim is to further advance research and publicise the data regarding problems associated with SALW through impartial, policy-relevant expertise. He said questions currently on the table include what to do about technological developments related to SALW, and what to expect next in terms of the UN Programme of Action process.

The introduction followed by key findings presented by speakers on the 2015 yearbook's chapters.

**Arms and the environment:** Poachers are using hunter rifles and military-grade firearms, which highlights the increasing militarisation of the issue and the rise in aggressive tactics by both poachers and anti-poaching forces. Increasingly militarised responses on both sides to the poaching issue are also negatively impacting civilians.

**Violence and frontier urbanisation:** There is greater need for focus on regulatory guidelines concerning private security actors especially. Currently, there is a lot of focus on areas relative to protection of workers in extraction industries but not enough on the actual extraction. Efforts to control and secure resources being extracted can attract various armed actors, such as security forces and predatory groups to mining sites as well as to rapidly expanding urban service areas.

**UN process update:** The BMS5 outcome document features a focus on practical implementation measures in the areas that states discussed. The outcome builds on previous UNPoA meeting outcomes by promoting women's participation in UNPoA-related processes, highlighting the importance of stockpile security and weapons tracing in conflict and post-conflict situations,

as well as emphasising training in building sustainable capacity for UNPoA implementation.

**Trade update—after the Arab Spring:** There is little evidence showing that the "Arab Spring" has had a significant impact on the policies of top or major exporters of small arms to the MENA region. Small arms exporters have authorised exports of small arms to non-state armed groups that are inclined to fight extremist groups. The emergence of ISIS has convinced many governments to send arms to non-state actors in the region.

**Stockpile management in Southeast Europe (SEE):** The Regional Approach to Stockpile Reduction (RASR) highlights the importance of sharing good practices and lessons learned; however surpluses persist in SEE, along with stockpile management challenges—sales and donations remain the favoured disposal method.

**Stockpiles at sea: Floating armouries in the Indian Ocean:** There is no publicly available registry of floating armouries, but research indicates around 30 vessels were operating in the High Risk Area in 2014. Floating armouries can hold approximately 1,000 firearms plus ammunition. Currently, there are no international standards for floating armoury security or storage and armoury practices vary significantly. There is concern over new market entrants that will seek to undercut existing operations by cutting costs and neglecting armoury security.

**Expanding arsenals (Insurgent arms in Northern Mali):** 54% of cartridges analysed were older than 35 years; 6 most frequent types all come from Russia and China. Armed groups today are better armed than they were a decade ago, including with larger-calibre weapons. Armed groups appear to have obtained much of their materiel through diversion from Malian army stockpiles; however Libyan stockpiles have also been an important source of materiel.

**Waning cohesion: Rise and Fall of the FDLR-FOCA:** The Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR) put in place state-like institutions and procedures in order to control territory and refugee camps in the DRC. The Forces Combattantes Abacunzi (FOCA), the armed wing of the FDLR, resembled closely the role of an army. This high level of cohesion was imperative to the strength of the group initially, with forces controlling over half of the natural minerals in the DRC in 2007. Several operations later (military interventions; DDR), the level of cohesion is dropping significantly, which has directly impacted the group's strength. The

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# SMALL ARMS MONITOR

## *Side event report, continued*

current weakened state of the FDLR-FOCA represents an opportunity for regional peace efforts, however with the remaining forces in hiding amongst civilians, the latter is at risk in the event of further military attacks.

**Unprotected: Young people in post-conflict Burundi:** Youth involvement in armed violence is still significant and influenced heavily by factors such as widespread pov-

erty, land disputes, manipulation by political parties, and the availability of arms from the civil war. Data on the use of firearms in Burundi is limited and major international assistance projects in Burundi in the post-conflict period have tended to neglect the provision of support to young people, who are most at risk of becoming involved in violence. •

## WHAT YOUTUBE TAUGHT US ABOUT SALW

*Sofia Tuvestad | WILPF Sweden and Linda Åkerström | Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society*

While Sweden prides itself with having one of the strictest export control systems in the world, there are still plenty of cases where Swedish weapons have ended up where they should not. Rather than through government reporting, information about diversion has reached the public in several cases through videos or photos taken with smartphones in conflict zones and uploaded to social platforms like Facebook or YouTube. The problem has thus become more visible to the general public, which has sparked debate on possible solutions. Is diversion an inherent part of international arms trade or is it something that can be prevented, and if so to what extent?

In December 2012, Swedish media revealed information that an M3, a version of the recoilless rifle Carl-Gustaf produced by Swedish arms company Saab Bofors Dynamics, had been found in northern Myanmar. The weapon had been license produced by India in 2003. It was then diverted to Myanmar and left in the northern region by government forces after clashes with local rebel forces from the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). The original source of information was photos taken by a freelance journalist in Myanmar.

The Swedish Minister of Trade at the time commented that the story indicated that "Swedish export controls work," as the Swedish export control agency ISP had been able to trace the weapon. A more logical conclusion would have been to recognise a need for stricter controls. The story shows a clear example of export controls not working well enough and a clear reminder of the well-known risks that come with all trade in small arms and light weapons (SALW).

The M3 found in Myanmar is just one example. Swedish media released information in 2011 that rebel forces in Libya were using Carl-Gustaf, and in 2013 about the system being used in combat by rebel forces in Syria. In both of these cases, the information reached public media through videos that were recorded with smartphones and sent to campaigners and journalists. Swedish

arms have also been found with FARC in Colombia, with al-Shabaab in Somalia, as well as with government forces in Iraq and Lebanon.

These cases show that even for a country that is considered to have strong regulations, arms trade always comes with risks of diversion. The easier the arms are to transport, steal, sell, or give away, the greater the risks involved. Besides the risk of a buyer country deliberately transferring arms for various reasons, there are always risks of arms changing hands in conflict zones. There is no clear-cut line between legal and illegal arms trade, and it is safe to assume that the video clips and photos that reach the public show only the tip of the iceberg.

Some of these cases reveal weaknesses in the system, including around end-user certificates that are put in place to certify that the buyer country approves the final recipient of the arms. While end-user certificates should be a given part of any control system that credits itself with being effective, it must also be combined with proper risk assessments, monitoring, as well as with follow-up actions. Lately, more focus has been put on the need to monitor where arms de facto end up, but it would be more efficient and reasonable to strengthen controls *before* any export is authorised.

Still, improving risk assessments and implementing stricter standards for authorisation is not enough. Should diversions happen, consequences must follow, no matter how good the customer. Unfortunately, this is rarely the case.

The increasing spread of technology combined with rapid information flows is making it more difficult to get away with diversion unnoticed. This is good news. But tracing diverted weapons can certainly not be our end goal. It must all be about prevention. All states, including those who considered themselves to already have strict systems in place, must implement stricter risk assessments and refuse authorisation when called for. •