

Committee: Human Rights Council

**Topic: Illicit trade in small arms and light
weapons**

Background

Small arms and light weapons are hand guns, pistols, sub-machine guns, mortars, landmines and light missiles. Basically, they are any weapon that can be transported by one person. 90% of all civilian deaths or injuries are because of these types of weapons. Every year up to 500 000 people die due to them. They also make conflicts last longer and make rebuilding after a conflict difficult. Since these weapons are easily hidden they remain available to people long after a conflict has ended. If violence breaks out the weapons escalate the fighting. They make it easier to continue the cycle of violence. Most small arms last for a very long time. Some weapons might still be usable after 100 years. This is a big problem because the weapons do not disappear after a certain amount of time. Because they are not destroyed the weapons just keep building up until there are more and more of them. This does not happen quickly - it happens over decades as violence continues or gets worse. As long as there is ammunition, weapons have the ability to kill and injure people. During the Cold War (1947-1991) many countries made weapons and sent them to the countries who were their allies. The Soviet Union sent small arms to other communist countries. The US sent weapons to capitalist countries. In the Vietnam War, communist countries sold weapons to North Vietnam to use against the US. The US sold small arms and missiles to Afghanistan to fight the Soviet Union. After the Soviet Union was defeated, the Taliban used those weapons to take over the country and terrorize the population. Less than 20 years later those same weapons were used against American soldiers invading the country.

Every illegal weapon started out as a legal weapon. Companies are allowed to sell weapons but they must follow national and international law. Sometimes companies, or countries, illegally buy or sell weapons. Other times, weapons are stolen and end up in the hands of criminals or terrorists. There is also what is known as the "Ant Trade". This is the buying and selling of small amounts of arms. Some of these weapons were stolen and some were legal but end up in the hands of criminals. Many illegal weapons are bought and sold this way. The individual numbers may be small but over time this results in huge amounts of weapons. These weapons often end up in the hands of criminals.

Recent Developments

- Some people do not think that weapon sales should be controlled by the government. These people see small arms as a tool to protect themselves and their family.
- In the Central African Republic, some people arm themselves and create self-defense groups to protect themselves from criminal gangs.
- Sudan and Syria are two countries that have been accused of killing their own citizens. If a person cannot trust his or her government, how should they protect themselves from violence?
- In the United States the Second Amendment gives people the right to own a weapon. The National Rifle Association (NRA) and other similar organizations work to protect this right.

- Guatemala and Mexico both include the right to “bear arms” in their Constitution like the United States.
- Although guns may be controlled by the government, the culture of the country may glorify or encourage the use of guns. In Lebanon people often shoot guns up into the sky to celebrate. This kills several people every year.
- In Pakistan’s north-western area it is not uncommon to see people openly carrying guns.
- The Philippines, Serbia, and Yemen all have gun cultures which normalize the use of guns.
- In Switzerland, all men must join the military. Therefore, every young man has a gun in his home.
- Some people choose to own illegal guns because it makes them feel safer or it has become part of their culture.
- The largest exporters of small arms are the United States, Italy, Germany, Brazil, Austria, Switzerland, Israel, Russia, South Korea, Belgium, China, Turkey, Spain, and the Czech Republic. Each of these countries sells at least US\$100 million yearly.
- The countries who import the smallest arms are the US, Canada, Germany, Australia, Thailand, United Kingdom, France and Italy. Each of these countries imports at least US\$100 million yearly.
- Not all countries keep track of what happens to weapons after they are bought or sold. They can end up stolen, lost, or sold to people who should not have them.
- Many guns the police in Mexico find in the hands of criminals were originally bought legally in the US. Half of the guns they cannot trace.
- Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals is Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. It encourages countries to work together to stop the spread of small arms and light weapons.
- One of the targets of Goal 16 is to reduce the flow of illegal weapons and stop organized crime. It would also like countries to keep track of the number of weapons seized.

Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (UNPoA)

- This programme was agreed to in July 2001. It seeks to encourage countries to create stricter national laws in order to stop the sale of illegal guns.
- Countries should control the export, and import of weapons as well as the transport and re-selling of weapons.
- Countries should work to stop people involved in the illegal sale of small arms and weapons. They should be arrested and brought to court.
- Every weapon should have an identifying mark so that law enforcement can tell where a weapon came from.

International Tracing Instrument (ITI)

- This agreement was accepted in 2005. It is part of the Programme of Action.
- States promised to make sure weapons are marked and that records are kept about them. If weapons are used in a crime the police can find the source.
- In 2015, tracing weapons became one of the targets of Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)

- The Arms Trade Treaty was adopted on the 2 April 2013 and came into force on the 24 December 2014. 130 countries are signatories.
- It asks countries not to send weapons to countries that the Security Council has determined has committed human rights abuses.
- Countries should be open about their weapon sales and report on their import and export of weapons.
- This treaty covers all weapons including tanks, missiles, warships, small arms and light weapons

Guiding Questions

1. Is your country involved in any conflicts at this time? What is your country's most recent conflict?
2. Is your country an importer or exporter of small arms and light weapons? For what purpose does it import these weapons?
3. What are the gun laws in your country? Are these laws similar to the laws of your neighbours? Why might countries want neighbouring countries to have similar gun control laws?
4. Has your country signed the Arms Trade Treaty? Why might it agree or disagree with this treaty?
5. Does your country have a problem with violence? What could be done to lessen the amount of violence in your country?
6. Small Arms and light weapons are especially a problem in the African continent. They do not have a large number of weapons but the weapons in Africa keep being used to cause conflict and violence. How can this cycle of violence be stopped?
7. How can people living in dangerous areas feel safe?
8. Does the problem exist in your community?
9. How does being a delegate from a different country help you understand this problem in your community?
10. How do the choices you make in your life help resolve this problem?