

Forum: Disarmament Commission

Topic: Addressing Illicit Small Arms Flows and Armed Group Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa

President

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a massive uptick in armed conflict caused by the illicit flow of small arms and light weapons, a serious threat to peace and security in the region. The theme of this year's Amman Model United Nations (AMMUN) conference, "Moderating Morality", emphasises the importance of discussing realistic solutions to the illicit flow of arms while ensuring national sovereignty, civilian security, and the effective reduction of armed groups' power to sustain violence. Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) are types of weapons that are easily transportable, concealable, and hard to trace. The characteristics of small arms and light weapons render them extremely dangerous, especially for regions with poor border control, corruption, and/or weak governments.

The illegal movement of small arms increases the capacity of non-state actors, militias, and criminal actors to survive in situations after the signing of peace agreements, resolutions, and ceasefires. This is especially true in Sub-Saharan Africa especially in the Sahel, Lake Chad Basin, Horn of Africa and even some parts of Central Africa. The illegal flow of weapons has played an important role in prolonging insurgencies, insecurity, inter-communal violence, organised crime, and civilian attacks. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have identified many reasons, such as insecure national borders, corruption, trafficking networks, and diversion of weapons from national stockpiles.

While this problem is mainly considered a problem involving weapons only, it includes many aspects that are equally as important to consider. Important aspects include good governance, protection of civilians, and protection of regional security. If weapons are easily and readily accessible to any militant group, these groups can easily go ahead and recruit economically disadvantaged young men or even kids, attack villages, control important trading routes, and destabilise nation states. Usually, the civilians are the ones who suffer the most from killing, displacement, extortion, and destruction of entire livelihoods.

This issue must be solved, and in order to effectively solve it, many things have to be done, beyond simply seizing the weapons of the armed groups. It requires multilateral cooperation between nation states on how to increase the security of their border control, how to fight corruption, and trace down the weapons. Meanwhile, the government and international organisations must try to solve the problems that motivate the formation of armed groups, such as poverty, poor governance, illiteracy, discrimination, unemployment, and other conflicts in the

regions.

Definition of Key Terms

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)

Small arms and light weapons (SALW) refer to weapons that can be carried and used by individuals or by small groups. Small arms usually include weapons such as pistols, rifles, assault rifles, and machine guns. While light weapons can include grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, and mortars.

Illicit Arms Trafficking

Illicit arms trafficking is the illegal transfer, sale, or smuggling or movement without authorisation from the government. This includes weapons being moved across borders, stolen from state stockpiles, or legally imported weapons that are diverted to criminal groups.

Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)

The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) is an international treaty that was officially adopted in 2013 and regulates the international trade of conventional weapons, such as small arms and light weapons. The treaty's purpose is to establish international standards and regulations for arms transfers to help reduce illicit trade.

United Nations Program of Action on Small Arms

The United Nations Program of Action was established in 2001 in order to prevent, combat, and eliminate the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons, and to encourage states to enhance their national legislation, marking, tracing, stockpile management, and international cooperation.

Arms Embargo

An arms embargo is the limitation or a ban on delivery of any weapons to a particular state, group of people, or area. This is mainly used to reduce the ability of the conflict actors to get access to the weapons.

General Overview

Illicit small arms flows are among the key factors that prolong the conflicts and make their resolution difficult. In contrast to big weapons systems, small arms and light weapons are cheap, durable, portable, and easy to transport. A rifle may work for many years if it is maintained properly. Therefore, weapons from previous wars continue to be active and keep fuelling violence. In case of regions with long, remote and difficult-to-control borders, weapons may be transported through deserts, forests, mountain routes, rivers, and informal trading ways.

The following areas in the Sub-Saharan Africa region experience the serious problem of illicit arms flows: the Sahel area, which includes Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, and the neighbouring countries; Lake Chad Basin with Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province; and part of the Horn of Africa and Central Africa. Conflict occurs in this region mainly due to the militias, insurgents, criminal armed groups, and corruption.

Illicit arms flows do not occur through one specific way or channel. Weapons can be smuggled to the neighbouring states by organised criminal groups, stolen from the military stocks, seized from the enemy during the battles, sold by the corrupt officials, or delivered through the informal markets. Interpol and ENACT (Enhancing Africa's Capacity to Respond More Effectively to Transnational Organised Crime) found that one of the key factors enabling the illicit circulation of firearms in Central and Western Africa are weak and insecure borders. The routes used for the transportation of weapons are the same as those used for the illegal transport of other products.

It is becoming even more complicated due to the condition of current national and regional control systems. There are states without up-to-date border surveillance systems, well-trained customs officers, an exact registry of weapons, or safe storage facilities. At times, there are states with good legislation, but there are not enough resources and political stability to implement it efficiently. In case of conflicts, governments are unable to control all of their territories, thus allowing armed groups to establish checkpoints, impose taxes on civilians, raid villages, and control the routes of smuggling. It challenges public confidence in the state and creates a vacuum of governance where armed groups can appear to be an authoritative figure.

Civilians are the primary victims of the accessibility to small arms and light weapons. Where weapons are easily accessible and cheap, conflicts escalate to bloodshed a lot faster. Armed groups can attack schools, markets, farms, and villages, leading to deaths, displacement, and

traumatic consequences. According to UNHCR, the insecurity in the Sahel continues to be the cause of serious risks, including attacks on civilians, arbitrary detention, and violence against women and girls. (UNHCR) Besides, the presence of weapons leads to child recruitment, gender-based violence, forced displacement, and economic devastation.

Many international and regional frameworks have been properly developed to address the issue, such as: the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), the United Nations Program of Action on Small Arms, the Firearms Protocol, the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, and the Nairobi Protocol. However, the gap between the international obligations and their local implementation is one of the biggest issues. Many of the tools that are currently being used heavily rely on manual reporting, voluntary cooperation, and state capacity. This leaves many gaps and allows for corruption, blackmail, and other loopholes where armed groups are able to slide through. When states are fragile, underfunded, or experience conflicts, the implementation of these tools is completely unreliable.

In conclusion, the illicit small arms flow in Sub-Saharan Africa is a disarmament problem, as well as a development, governance, civilian protection, border security, organised crime, terrorism, and a regional cooperation issue. The resolution of the problem requires the prevention of illegal flows, as well as reducing the insecurity, poverty, political exclusion, and lack of trust which create the conditions for recruiting and the growth of armed groups.

Subtopic 1: Illegal Transfer of Small Arms and Light Weapons Between Countries During Armed Conflicts

An important factor behind the continuous violent conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa is the illegal transfer of small arms and light weapons from one country to another during these conflicts. Groups fighting for various reasons need a continuous supply of weapons to keep up the fight, thus causing continued violence even after the signing of peace agreements and disarmament programs. Illicit weapons transfers in the region are made possible because of ineffective control over the borders, porous borders, and difficult geographical conditions. In areas like the Sahel, the deserts, forests and unofficial trading routes help weapons to move around borders without any notice by individual governments.

There is also corruption and organised crime behind the spread of illegal weapons in the region. Weapons can be smuggled by paying off border security, customs officers, police or military personnel. Additionally, trafficking of illegal weapons goes together with other kinds of

organised crime, including drug and human trafficking, illegal mining and smuggling. It can also happen that during the time of armed conflict, weapons will be seized from the military or police or provided to proxy groups to support armed conflict.

The continuous smuggling of illegal weapons across borders makes national authorities and regional agreements on arms control less effective. As long as there is some slack in the control of one country's borders or in its legislation concerning arms control, traffickers can simply move to it from another place. This proves that unilateral steps taken by individual governments are not always enough. More coordination among countries in the region is needed.

Subtopic 2: Impact of Small Arms Accessibility and Non-State Armed Group Activity on Civilians

Availability of Small Arms and Light Weapons within Sub-Saharan Africa has caused humanitarian effects within the civilian community within the region. Because of their cost-effectiveness, portability, and ease of acquisition, armed groups have been able to escalate acts of violence against civilians at a rapid rate. As a result, civilians are attacked in villages, schools, marketplaces, and clinics, with killings, abductions, extortion, and threats becoming commonplace.

This causes a major humanitarian effect as the ability of these weapons enables escalation and difficulty for government intervention. Primarily, the most common humanitarian effect is displacement of people. This occurs because families leave their place of living for protection against attacks, creating many IDPs and refugees. Such situations cause many difficulties within surrounding communities and the state governments as well as the NGOs, disrupting schooling, healthcare provision, agricultural practices, and the economy overall. At the same time, lack of government protection weakens governmental authority further, making armed groups form their own power structures and strengthen even more.

Social impact caused by weaponisation does not end after the period of violent conflict. Often, unemployed youth who live in desperate conditions are recruited by armed groups either through financial gain or ideology. The main reasons behind vulnerability among women and children are gender-based violence and exploitation, human trafficking, child soldier recruitment, and deprivation of education and health services. Hence, civilians face poverty, economic development stagnation, and psychological trauma.

Subtopic 3: Strengthening Enforcement Mechanisms and State Capacity in Arms Control Implementation

While there are many different international and regional agreements aimed at regulating small arms and light weapons, these agreements' efficiency depends greatly on whether the countries can successfully enforce the agreements. In most Sub-Saharan African countries, there are many problems with a lack of sufficient funds, staff members, technological advancements, and institutions necessary to monitor and control weapons, identify them, and record them accordingly.

One problem associated with this issue is that the weapons storage facilities run by the government do not have appropriate security measures to protect the weapons. As such, this leads to the theft of the weapons stored at military bases or even being taken by rebel armies during conflicts. Another obstacle is the existence of corruption between the officials responsible for enforcing the agreements as well as those running criminal organisations. This occurs when the corrupt officials do not punish smugglers of illegal weapons and continue assisting the smuggling process. Therefore, while some countries might have strict laws against small arms and light weapons, implementing those regulations proves to be extremely difficult.

In order to fix these issues, strengthening governmental capabilities to store weapons safely, developing technologies that will help border control and customs departments monitor borders effectively, and training relevant employees appropriately is crucial. Cooperation between neighbouring countries is also required for tracing the network of smugglers across several borders. International organisations may provide countries with assistance.

Major Parties Involved

Nigeria:

Nigeria suffers considerably from illicit small arms trafficking and the activity of armed groups. The security situation in Nigeria is being threatened by the activities of such armed organisations as Boko Haram, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), armed bandits, and communal militias. Given that Nigeria has a considerable population, long land borders, and occupies an important strategic position in the region, this country plays an important part in regional arms control. In addition, Nigeria is one of the members of ECOWAS and participates in initiatives concerning combating illicit arms trafficking.

Mali:

Since 2012, Mali has faced insurgencies, military coups, and the activities of extremist groups operating in the region of the Sahel. As a result of the illegal influx of arms from neighbouring states, these armed groups remained active despite the presence of peacekeepers. Mali is a good example of the problems associated with the arms control implementation in a state with poor institutional capacities and insufficient territorial control.

Burkina Faso:

In recent years, Burkina Faso has become one of the countries facing a significant problem of armed violence. The rapid growth of armed extremist organisations has led to the emergence of a humanitarian crisis and mass displacement of the population. The constant influx of illicit small arms allows these groups to attack civilians, security forces, and government facilities.

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS):

ECOWAS plays a leading regional role in the fight against illicit small arms trafficking due to the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons. ECOWAS promotes cooperation, harmonises legislation, and supports information exchange concerning cross-border trafficking of arms and stockpile management.

African Union (AU):

The African Union plays a crucial role in continental initiatives on peace and security, for example, the "Silencing the Guns" agenda of the African Union. AU contributes to conflict prevention, peacebuilding, disarmament, and regional cooperation, encouraging African states to enhance their governance and eliminate the factors promoting armed group activity.

United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA):

UNODA assists Member States in implementing international arms control agreements, including the Program of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons. UNODA provides technical assistance and promotes transparency and international cooperation concerning the reduction of the illicit conventional arms trade.

United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC):

UNODC is aimed at fighting transnational organised crime, including illicit firearms trafficking. UNODC carries out research, assists governments in strengthening legislation, provides technical training and supports the implementation of the Firearms Protocol and other international agreements.

Interpol:

Interpol assists law enforcement agencies in information exchange, cross-border investigations and fighting against organised criminal networks engaged in firearms trafficking.

Timeline of Events

Date:	Event:
2001	The United Nations adopted the Program of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (UN PoA) which served as the main international framework for solving the problem of illicit small arms trafficking.
May 31, 2001	The United Nations adopted the Firearms Protocol supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and criminalizing illicit firearms manufacturing and trafficking.
June 14, 2006	ECOWAS adopted the Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Materials as the legal basis of the regional regulations concerning small arms trafficking in West Africa.
April 2, 2013	The United Nations General Assembly officially adopted the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) providing international standards of the conventional arms transfers regulation.
May, 2013	The "Silencing the Guns" initiative of the African Union was started in order to reduce the number of armed conflicts and the spread of illicit

	weapons across Africa.
2023	The UNODC conducted lots of research specially devoted to the connections between firearms trafficking, organized crime, terrorism and instability in the Sahel region.

Attempts to solve the issue

"ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Materials" (Date: 2006/06/14) (Treaty Number: ECOWAS Convention C/REG.13/06/06)

The ECOWAS Convention is the legally binding regional treaty adopted by the Economic Community of West African States to control the manufacture, transfer, possession, and movement of small arms and light weapons in the territory of West Africa. Under this Convention, Member States should take steps to improve their border security, stockpile management, arms transfer control, and prevention of illicit trafficking.

Despite setting one of the most powerful regional frameworks for small arms control, the ECOWAS Convention is still inconsistently implemented because of corruption, political instability, open borders, and poor governmental institutions in several Member States.

"Arms Trade Treaty" (Date: 2013/04/02) (Resolution Number: A/RES/67/234 B)

The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) was adopted by the UN General Assembly via resolution A/RES/67/234 B. It set the legal standards for regulating the international trade of conventional arms, including small arms and light weapons. To authorise an export of arms, States Parties to the Treaty have to assess whether such trade might contribute to terrorism, organised crime, human rights violations, and breaches of international humanitarian law.

Although the ATT has contributed greatly to enhancing transparency and accountability in the international arms trade, its efficiency is limited since not all major arms exporters are parties to it. Moreover, the Treaty regulates only legal transfers of arms and is unable to prevent their subsequent illicit transfer, theft, or diversion.

“Program of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects” (Date: 2001/07/20) (Document Number: A/CONF.192/15)

In contrast to a General Assembly resolution, the Program of Action (UN PoA) was endorsed by the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. This Program of Action is published in UN document A/CONF.192/15 and represents its official source. It calls for strengthening national laws, stockpile management, the development of a marking and tracing system, and international cooperation to address illicit trade in small arms.

However, although the Program of Action dramatically increased international cooperation and set the basis for the international regulation of small arms control, it is politically but not legally binding. Therefore, there are significant differences in implementing this Program among the Member States of the United Nations, especially when the financial resources and governmental institutions of some of them are weak.

Possible Solutions

Subtopic 1:

There are many solutions for the illegal transfer of SALW between countries during armed conflicts, such as sharing intelligence, joint border patrols, and the creation of databases specifically aimed at firearms trafficking tracking. Focusing on these possible solutions can help improve regional cooperation between governments and make it difficult for militias to gain access to arms. Taking into account the fact that most of the arms trafficking channels pass through several countries, regional organisations like ECOWAS, the African Union, and Interpol should cooperate during their investigations and unify the customs process so that the weaker border control system cannot be used by trafficking networks. Additionally, arms marking, tracking, stockpiling, and sanctions for corruption connected with weapons trafficking have to be strengthened tremendously through marking and tracing systems, improving security, and enforcing strict penalties for corruption linked to illegal arms trafficking.

International organisations can help with this issue by providing financial and technological support to guarantee that border officials, customs services, and police can identify and seize

illegal weapons; joint border patrols, and the creation of databases aimed at tracking firearms trafficking can help to improve regional cooperation between governments. Especially since many of the countries in this region are developing nations. Taking into account the fact that most of the arms trafficking channels pass through several different countries, regional organisations like ECOWAS, the African Union, and Interpol have to cooperate during their investigations and unify the customs process so that the weaker border control system cannot be used by trafficking networks. Additionally, arms marking, tracking, stockpiling, and sanctions for corruption connected with weapons trafficking have to be strengthened.

Subtopic 2:

The limitation of the accessibility of illegal firearms and the effect of armed groups on the state are necessary actions to protect civilians. First of all, the government has to implement DDR programs at the community level and develop education, employment, vocational training, and youth empowerment to lower the number of new recruits. In such a way, the government will be able to solve the issue related to social and economic conditions which are making young people vulnerable to armed groups' recruitment. At the same time, community leaders and civil society organisations, along with local authorities, should be involved in the process of reconciliation and peaceful reintegration of former combatants. Such actions will help to decrease the influence of the armed groups.

It is necessary to improve humanitarian action to help affected communities. It means providing security and protection for refugees and internally displaced persons, providing medical treatment, trauma, and psychological services for the victims of conflict; protecting schools and hospitals from attacks and ensuring access to food, drinking water, and sanitation. Moreover, the government and humanitarian organisations should guarantee special assistance and protection of the most vulnerable categories such as women and children. In addition to that, all military and security actions have to take place according to the requirements of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Subtopic 3:

It is extremely important to find a proper and efficient solution towards strengthening enforcement mechanisms and state capacity in arms control implementation. Firstly, it is crucial to empower national organisations that deal with arms control to improve legislation, provide additional funds to border services, increase stockpile security, and develop secure databases to

register, mark, and trace weapons properly, easily, and efficiently. Additionally, it is essential to empower customs authorities, border security organisations, and law enforcement organisations to detect and intercept illegal firearms that would otherwise end up in the possession of dangerous groups. Furthermore, modernisation of the existing systems of licensing of firearms, control over legal firearms and coordination within the governmental structures are all very important to monitor all stages of the weapons' lifecycle and ensure it does not get into the hands of dangerous individuals or groups. Law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, and judges need to be trained to conduct effective investigations and prosecutions of illicit firearms trafficking cases; specialised anti-corruption measures have to be taken in order to prevent officials from illegally facilitating arms transfers.

International non-governmental agencies and nations could work together to help provide developing countries in the region with technology, security workshops, information sharing, and help these countries develop systems to ensure the proper tracing of weapons. International partnerships could help with border surveillance equipment, advanced trading technology, and training workshops for security. Treaties could be signed which ensure there is regular reporting on national arms control measures, illicit firearms seizures, and progress in implementing international commitments. Put all in one, these measures will ensure that governments can consistently fulfil their commitments to combat illicit arms trafficking.

Guiding Questions

1. Why are the borders in the Sahel region difficult to monitor?
2. How do weak border controls contribute to the movement of illicit weapons?
3. What is Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR)?
4. Is your delegation affected by the illegal trade of small arms and light weapons?
5. Is your delegation a State Party to the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)?
6. Does corruption affect your delegation’s ability to combat arms trafficking?
7. Does your delegation maintain a national weapons marking and tracing system?
8. Has your delegation implemented the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (UN PoA)?

Appendix

- https://disarmament.unoda.org/en/our-work/conventional-arms/small-arms-and-light-weapons
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