Press Release

Third United Nations Conference (RevCon3) on tackling illicit small arms
to open on June 18th

NEW YORK – Government representatives will come together in New York from 18-29 June 2018 for the third United Nations Conference (RevCon3) to review progress made in the implementation of the Programme of Action on small arms. The review conference provides a once-per-six-years opportunity to coherently address the uncontrolled flow and illicit circulation of small arms which disrupt communities around the world.

Small arms: big problem

Most present-day conflicts are fought with small arms and light weapons. These are the weapons of choice in civil wars, organised crime, gang warfare and terrorist attacks. They are easy to use, to carry, and to conceal. Illicit flows of small arms and light weapons undermine security and the rule of law, and they are often a factor behind the forced displacement of civilians and massive human rights violations including sexual abuse and gender-based violence.

Armed violence erodes legal and peaceful dispute resolution mechanisms, undermines the rule of law, and puts electoral processes at risk. Contemporary armed conflict is the main cause of people fleeing their homes, and has become the most common cause of food insecurity, as illustrated by the crises in Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen.

2017 was the deadliest year for UN peacekeeping forces in over two decades, with illicit small arms contributing to the kind of pervasive violence that killed 56 peacekeepers last year alone – more than one per week.

Armed violence aggravates poverty, inhibits access to social services, and burdens public health spending. It forms a grave impediment to economic growth: nothing is more damaging to an investment climate as armed insecurity.
A unique weapons category

Small arms are generally the only weapons category allowed in civilian possession. It means that their regulation needs to cover a uniquely wide area of arms control. Apart from national institutions including armed forces, border control, engagement may be warranted with local business, municipal government, police, grass-roots civil society groups, at-risk youth, and community violence reduction initiatives.

Moreover, regulation of a weapon category that is not only held by government entities but is also – mainly – in public circulation, will need to be based on sound and comprehensive national data-collecting practices.

Low security: poor development

The landmark 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development crucially recognizes that only peaceful societies will achieve desired levels of sustainable development. Under Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, Target 16.4 calls for a significant reduction of the illicit flow of arms.

Programme of Action

In 2001, UN Member States agreed by consensus to the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, the key global framework to combat this scourge. Governments committed to having adequate national legislation and stockpile management in place, regulating arms brokers, fostering regional cooperation and engaging in cooperation and assistance.

The complementary International Tracing Instrument (ITI), agreed in 2005 within the Programme of Action framework, requires that weapons are properly marked and that records are kept, and provides a solid framework for cooperation in weapons tracing.

While progress has been made in tackling the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons over the past two decades, many challenges remain.

Moreover, new concerns emerge such as the increasing links between transnational organized crime, illicit small arms trafficking and terrorism, as well as the use of emerging technologies (3-D printing, plastics, modular weapons) and the internet, including the “dark web”, for illicit trafficking and production.

Thus, in his recently launched Agenda for Disarmament “Securing Our Common Future”, the Secretary-General called on the international community to address small arms regulation in line with the magnitude of the problem. He announced the launch of a trust facility within the UN that allows for a whole-of-system approach in the most-affected countries, replacing piecemeal projects with curbing the illicit-small-arms problem through holistic, multi-year programming.

Within the framework of the Programme of Action, States agreed to support data collection for relevant SDG indicators through their biennial national reports, and to provide assistance for building sustainable capacity to report on seized small arms and light weapons that have been recorded and traced in accordance with international standards and legal instruments (SDG indicator 16.4.2).

At RevCon3, the international community can renew its commitment to the full and effective implementation of the Programme of Action and its International Tracing Instrument and to continue the work towards a common goal of peace, security and development for all.

www.un.org/disarmament/convars/revcon3
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