In 2001, countries adopted the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA). In it, governments agreed to improve national small arms regulations, to strengthen stockpile management, to ensure that weapons are properly and reliably marked, to improve cooperation in weapons tracing, and to engage in regional and international cooperation and assistance.

“The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development importantly affirms that combatting the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons is necessary for the achievement of many goals, including those relating to peace, justice and strong institutions, poverty reduction, economic growth, health, gender equality, and safe cities and communities.”

António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General, in Securing Our Common Future. An Agenda for Disarmament

Marking, record-keeping, and tracing

In 2005, the General Assembly adopted the International Tracing Instrument (ITI), which specifically provides a framework for cooperation in weapons tracing – thus fulfilling one of the commitments governments made in the PoA.

Countering organized crime: The Firearms Protocol

The Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, known as The Firearms Protocol, supplements the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. This protocol provides a framework for States to control and regulate legal arms, prevent their diversion into illegal circuits, and facilitate the investigation and prosecution of related offences. It promotes and strengthens international cooperation and developing mechanisms to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition. Meetings under this United Nations process are held in Vienna, and serviced by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime.

Periodic review of implementation

A conference to review the progress made in the implementation of the PoA is convened every six years. Between review conferences, Biennial Meetings of States (BMS) are held. Additionally, countries have held Meetings of Governmental Experts (MGE) to benefit from the knowledge of technical specialists on matters pertaining to small arms control. The most recent Review Conference was convened in June 2018; States recommitted to the full implementation of the PoA and ITI.
Small arms and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has created a linkage between peace and security on the one hand and development on the other. The full and effective implementation of the PoA and its ITI is important for attaining Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions and its Target 16.4 which calls for a significant reduction of illicit arms flows. At the June 2018 Review Conference, States agreed to continue to make use of existing national reports under the PoA and the ITI to support data collection for the relevant SDG indicator on significantly reducing illicit arms flows.

Small arms and the Security Council

The United Nations Security Council has been increasingly concerned with the issue of small arms and light weapons. Every two years the Council holds a thematic meeting on small arms. In 2015, the Security Council adopted its second resolution dedicated to the issue (S/RES/2220). In 2017, the Security Council discussed the Secretary-General’s report S/2017/1025.

The role of the Office for Disarmament Affairs

➢ Organize, service and support meetings on the PoA and ITI;
➢ Facilitate exchanges of information;
➢ Provide technical advice and assistance, including through the UN Regional Centres;
➢ Develop tools, guidelines, standards to facilitate implementation of commitments;
➢ Promote system-wide coordination among relevant UN partners;
➢ Cooperate with relevant regional and international organizations;
➢ Develop and manage trust fund arrangements in cooperation with States wishing to contribute, and UN system partners.

Consistent, high-quality advice

The United Nations makes available a set of international small arms control standards (ISACS), which provide practical, authoritative guidance to practitioners and policymakers on a broad range of small arms control issues. Visit www.smallarmsstandards.org.


Supporting activities


The Secretary-General has recently announced he will establish an ambitious trust facility under the Peacebuilding Fund for sustained, cross-sectional, multi-year programming on small-arms control in selected countries.

For more information, contact conventionalarms-unoda@un.org or visit www.un.org/disarmament/salw