

# QUICK GUIDE

RESULTS OF THE THIRD  
REVIEW CONFERENCE  
ON THE ILLICIT TRADE  
IN SMALL ARMS AND  
LIGHT WEAPONS

OCTOBER 2018



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# QUICK GUIDE

This quick guide provides an overview of key outcomes of the third Review Conference on the Programme of Action to Reduce, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA). It includes suggested follow-up actions, primarily focused on analysts, activists, and diplomats.

This guide supplements several other resources available from IANSA, including: “Summary of the Outcome of the Third Review Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspects,” by Brian Wood (forthcoming); “Small Arms, Big Harms: A Call to Action by Civil Society on Gender and Small Arms Control,” from the IANSA Women’s Network; and “Six key issues for the 2018 Review Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons,” by Dr. Natalie Goldring.<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

The Review Conference in June 2018 was the third for the PoA, which was originally agreed in 2001. Between review conferences, States convene Biennial Meetings of States (BMS), of which there have been six. Each BMS is generally designed for States to provide updates on the implementation of the PoA, while the review conferences give States the opportunity for more substantial changes to strengthen and define the PoA’s implementation.

From the beginning of the preparatory process for this RevCon, the President, Ambassador Jean-Claude Brunet of France, emphasized the continuing importance of consensus decision-making, as has been the case at many previous meetings in the PoA process. In the past, this has meant that consensus in effect has equaled unanimity, with a single country often able to block progress. This year, however, States refused to allow this to happen. Two key paragraphs on ammunition and one on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development were opposed by a small number of States, but in the end were included in the document because of the support of the overwhelming majority of States. The Outcome Document was ultimately adopted unanimously – including gaining the support of the States that had opposed individual paragraphs.

This Guide uses the framework of six key Issues that IANSA identified as needing additional attention in the PoA process:

- The illicit trade in ammunition;
- Gender-based action to curb SALW proliferation and violence;
- Destruction of surplus and excessive accumulations of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and ammunition;
- Links between small arms and light weapons reduction, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.4, and development;

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<sup>1</sup> These resources are available at <https://www.iansa.org/briefing-papers>

- Measures to address armed violence, crime, and conflict; and
- Synergies in implementing the PoA and the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT).

For each of these six issues, this Quick Guide gives a brief summary of what happened at the Conference and why it's important, with some suggestions for next steps.

## ILLICIT TRADE IN AMMUNITION

### What happened and why the results are important

The Outcome Document includes two important paragraphs on ammunition. The first welcomes the newly created General Assembly process that focuses on developing ways to deal with the accumulation of surplus conventional ammunition.<sup>2</sup> The second paragraph acknowledges the usefulness of States exchanging information in order to increase their ability to deal with SALW ammunition. It emphasizes that States may learn lessons from other instruments that are applicable to the implementation of the PoA.<sup>3</sup>

While various diplomats and civil society representatives were involved in efforts to reach consensus language on this issue, they were unsuccessful. The US delegation demanded a vote on both paragraphs, even opposing the paragraph that mentioned a process

they themselves had supported in the General Assembly. Ultimately, delegations voted overwhelmingly in favor of including the two paragraphs.

The inclusion of language on ammunition is a significant step forward from a substantive perspective, because it represents recognition of the critical importance of dealing with SALW ammunition as part of the PoA.<sup>4</sup> In a move with important substantive and process implications, proponents of a strong PoA successfully asserted themselves by insisting on including language on ammunition and by supporting strong text for paragraph 18 when attempts to reach consensus failed. That States ultimately gave unanimous approval to the Outcome Document is also important from a process perspective, and sets a precedent for future meetings.

### Next steps

An important next step is to encourage governments to review their existing legislation, to exchange information with other countries, and to report publicly on ammunition exports, imports, and transit, both in their reports on the PoA and in implementing other instruments such as the Arms Trade Treaty.

<sup>2</sup> Declaration, paragraph 16: "We welcome the process established by General Assembly Resolution 72/55, adopted by consensus, with a view to identifying urgent issues pertaining to the accumulation of conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus on which progress can be made."

<sup>3</sup> Section II para 18: "To acknowledge that States that apply provisions of the Programme of Action to small arms and light weapons ammunition can exchange and, as appropriate, apply relevant

experiences, lessons learned and best practices acquired within the framework of other relevant instruments to which a State is a Party, as well as relevant international standards, in strengthening their implementation of the Programme of Action."

<sup>4</sup> For further information on SALW ammunition control, see Peter Danssaert and Brian Wood, "Surplus and Illegal Small Arms, Light Weapons and their Ammunition: The consequences of failing to dispose and safely destroy them," IANSA and International Peace Information Service, 2017.

## **GENDER-BASED ACTION TO CURB SALW**

### **What happened and why the results are important**

Work on gender is one of the important successes of RevCon3. The Outcome Document contains remarkably strong commitments, including a long-overdue focus on gender-based violence. This continued the progress on gender issues that has been made in recent Biennial Meetings of States. For example, the Outcome Document encourages full use of gender-disaggregated data on the illicit trade in SALW. It calls for States to work together to increase the extent to which gender dimensions are in the mainstream of programs to combat the illicit trade in SALW. It also has strong language on the importance of the full participation and representation of women.<sup>5</sup>

When the PoA was originally adopted in 2001, the word “gender” was so controversial that it was not even mentioned in the document. The extensive language on gender in the RevCon3 Outcome Document reflects extraordinary progress over the course

<sup>5</sup> Section II, paragraph 74: “To encourage the full participation and representation of women, including in leadership roles, and acting as agents of change, in policymaking, planning and implementation processes related to the Programme of Action, such as national small arms commissions and programmes relating to community safety, violence reduction, collection and destruction of small arms and light weapons and conflict prevention and resolution.”

of the PoA’s existence, and particularly in the past several years.

The language on gender-based violence in the Outcome Document is consistent with many recommendations from the IANSA Women’s Network and with the Call to Action on Gender and Small Arms Control, which has been favorably received by many States.

### **Next steps**

Full implementation of the Outcome Document’s commitments on gender will require political will at all levels of society and sufficient funding to carry out the proposed activities. One low-cost, immediate improvement would be for governments to ensure full and effective participation of women on their national small arms commissions and in their delegations to relevant conferences and meetings.

## **DESTRUCTION OF SURPLUS AND EXCESSIVE SALW AND AMMUNITION**

### **What happened and why the results are important**

The Outcome Document contains strong language on destruction of surplus, confiscated, seized, and collected SALW.<sup>6</sup> It discusses the

<sup>6</sup> Section II paragraph 45: “Subject to any legal constraints associated with the preparation of criminal prosecutions, to destroy confiscated, seized or collected small arms and light weapons that have been illegally manufactured, unless another form of disposition or use has been officially authorized, in which case such weapons have been duly identified, marked and recorded.”

importance of stockpile management, disposal of surplus weapons, and best practices to ensure that deactivation and destruction are irreversible. It also calls for international cooperation on how best to effectively implement these measures. Destruction of surplus, confiscated, seized, and collected SALW is an issue that IANSA has highlighted in many different fora over the years.

Irreversible destruction is the best way to ensure that weapons are not recirculated and reused; it gives certainty that weapons will not be reused and recycled.<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, the RevCon did little to directly address excessive and destabilizing accumulations of weapons and ammunition. This is a significant shortcoming of the Outcome Document.

**“In my math class, I came face to face with the terrifying reality of gun violence. Crouching in the corner of my classroom, I can still hear the screams of the students and teachers from the floors above and below.”**

*- Mei-Ling Ho-Shing, 17-year old survivor of the Parkland, Florida school shooting, in her civil society presentation at RevCon3*

<sup>7</sup> For extended analysis of this issue, please see Peter Danssaert and Brian Wood, “Surplus and Illegal Small Arms, Light Weapons and their Ammunition:

## Next steps

Governments should work to ensure robust implementation of these provisions. For example, it is important to seek funding to ensure that confiscated, seized, and collected weapons are destroyed, not simply stored or returned to circulation. Analysts, activists, and governments should increase attention to the consequences of excessive and destabilizing accumulation of weapons, developing and implementing measures to prevent such accumulations.

## LINKS BETWEEN SALW REDUCTION, SDG 16.4, AND DEVELOPMENT

### What happened and why the results are important

The Outcome Document contains numerous mentions linking the PoA to sustainable development, many of which specifically mention the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While only one paragraph contains a direct broader link to the SDGs, there also are other connections elsewhere in the Outcome Document. The most significant commitment is contained in paragraph 13 of the Declaration:

We also stress the importance of the full and effective implementation of the Programme of Action and the International Tracing Instrument to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in particular

the consequences of failing to dispose and safely destroy them,” IANSA and International Peace Information Service, 2017.

Goal 16 and target 16.4, which calls for a significant reduction of illicit arms flows by 2030; and acknowledge that sustainable development cannot be realized without peace and security and that peace and security will be at risk without sustainable development, and note that the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons has implications for the realization of several Sustainable Development Goals, including those relating to peace, justice and strong institutions, poverty reduction, economic growth, health, gender equality, and safe cities and communities.

The Outcome Document's substantive successes in this area include recognizing important and extensive links among SALW reduction, SDG 16.4, and development. In particular, Paragraph 13 of the Declaration in the Outcome Document directly acknowledges these links. This text is particularly useful for those who want to develop the connections to various aspects of achieving sustainable development, including exploring the links between the reduction of illicit arms flows and illicit financial flows, as contained in SDG 16.4. These commitments were supported by the overwhelming majority of States despite the efforts of Syria, Iran, and others to weaken and constrain references to the SDGs.

The success in linking SALW reduction, SDG 16.4, and development in the Outcome Document

was also important from a process perspective. Governments supporting more extensive recognition of these links won out over those who sought to use the consensus process to secure agreement on weakened provisions. In the end, the government of Syria insisted on a vote on paragraph 13, but then abstained from the actual vote.

### **Next steps**

Government and inter-governmental agencies should develop action plans and devote resources at the local, national, regional and global levels to integrate work to eradicate the illicit trade in SALW with official development assistance programs. Analysts and advocates specializing in SALW issues also need to work more closely with organizations focusing on development work to develop and enhance synergies among their projects.

## **MEASURES TO ADDRESS ARMED VIOLENCE, CRIME, AND CONFLICT**

### **What happened and why the results are important**

The Outcome Document refers to crime and violence in several places. It recognizes that the illicit trade in SALW makes it more difficult to enforce international human rights law. It also discusses linkages between the illicit trade in SALW and trafficking in both people and goods and the importance of strengthening cooperation against transnational organized crime.<sup>8</sup>

including crime, contributes to the displacement of civilians, undermines respect for international humanitarian law, and impedes the provision of

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<sup>8</sup> For example, paragraph 4 of the Declaration states: "We emphasize that the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects continues to sustain conflicts, exacerbates armed violence,

This is extremely important, as the vast majority of deaths and injuries with SALW do not take place in situations of armed conflict. In addition, it is disappointing that the Outcome Document does not even mention the need for States to implement the UN protocol dealing with the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts, components and ammunition, which supplements the Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime. It also fails to mention the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, which are intended to ensure that the use of firearms by State actors is consistent with international human rights standards.

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**He shot me point blank, leaving me paraplegic for the rest of my life. I survived, but each year more than a hundred thousand Latin Americans do not.**

”

- Alex Galvez, IANSA member and Executive Director of the Transitions Foundation of Guatemala, in his civil society presentation at RevCon3.

#### Next steps

Analysts and activists should work to convince governments to integrate efforts to combat the illicit trade in SALW across government agencies and to ratify and implement the UN Firearms Protocol and the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and

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humanitarian assistance to victims of armed conflicts.”

Firearms. In some countries, these issues are dealt with separately in military and police force regulations and in criminal codes. In their national plans of action to counter armed crime and trafficking, governments should avoid duplication of effort and should ensure that essential information is shared among relevant agencies at the national, regional, and global levels.

#### SYNERGIES IN IMPLEMENTING THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION AND THE ARMS TRADE TREATY (ATT)

##### What happened and why the results are important

Unfortunately, governments and civil society were not successful in achieving explicit recognition in the Outcome Document of important links between the PoA and other international instruments. The Outcome Document does not refer directly to the ATT, the UN Firearms Protocol, or other relevant instruments, because of the resistance of a small group of States.

Nevertheless, the Outcome Document does refer to relevant synergies among the PoA, the International Tracing Instrument, and target 16.4 of the Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Outcome Document also contains several references to “other relevant instruments to which a state is a party,” to “legally binding instruments to which a State is a party,” and to “all other instruments to which a state is a party.” Taken together, these commitments provide the basis for work among like-minded States to take advantage of the synergies among the various

instruments relevant to combatting the illicit trade of SALW in all its aspects.

### **Next steps**

There are many opportunities to take advantage of synergies among the PoA and relevant international and regional instruments.<sup>9</sup> As IANSA has long stressed, it is critically important to help governments take advantage of the synergies between the PoA and the ATT, as well as the synergies between the UN Firearms Protocol and the PoA. Developing and taking advantage of these synergies can help reinforce and strengthen global efforts to end illicit trafficking in SALW.

### **CONCLUSION**

One important challenge is generating sufficient political will in governments to move forward on these key issues. Another challenge is securing funding for States and civil society actors to that they can undertake or increase their efforts.

The commitments made by States in RevCon3 included significant progress on both substantive and process issues. The Outcome Document provides opportunities for further work on critically important issues at national, regional, and global levels.

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**Graphic design :**  
*Burchell Gordon*  
*Nonviolence International-NY*

### **Funding provided by :**



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<sup>9</sup> See Dr. Natalie Goldring, "The Programme of Action, the Arms Trade Treaty, and

the UN Register of Conventional Arms: Seeking Synergy and Overcoming Challenges," IANSA, June 2016.