

Frequently asked questions on the 2006 Small Arms Review Conference

1. What is the 2006 Small Arms Review Conference?

The “United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects” is part of the follow-up process recommended by the States that participated in the United Nations Conference that adopted the Programme of Action (PoA) in July 2001 (A/CONF.192/15). It is a gathering of delegates from UN Member States, representatives of international and regional organizations, as well as of civil society, to review progress made in the Programme’s implementation.

2. When is the 2006 Small Arms Review Conference taking place?

The United Nations General Assembly decided that the Conference would be held in New York from 26 June to 7 July 2006 (A/RES/59/86). No meetings will be held on the July 4, which is a US and UN Holiday.

3. Why is the Conference important?

The Review Conference provides the first formal opportunity for the international community to review the progress and problems that have occurred over the last five years in implementing the wide range of commitments made in the PoA.

4. What is the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects?

The Programme of Action represents an international political commitment aiming to curb the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons (SALW). The package deal was adopted unanimously, after much discussion and negotiation, by UN Member States at the July 2001 United Nations Conference on the subject.

The PoA contains a wide range of political undertakings and concrete actions that Member States committed themselves to carrying out at the national, regional and global levels. They include such measures as developing, adopting or strengthening national laws, regulations and administrative procedures for effective control over the production of small arms and light weapons within their areas of jurisdiction and over the export, import, transit or retransfer of such weapons in order to prevent illegal manufacture and illicit trafficking. Member States committed themselves to fostering international cooperation and assistance to strengthen the ability of States to identify and trace illicit arms and light weapons.

5. How has progress been monitored so far?

Member States have submitted annual national reports on their implementation of the PoA. These reports are publicly available at <http://disarmament.un.org/cab>. 103 States sent reports in 2005. In

addition, States, intergovernmental and civil society organizations shared their experiences and views on the implementation of the PoA during two biennial UN meetings held in 2003 and 2005.

6. Does the Programme of Action aim to curb the legal trade in small arms and light weapons?

No. The PoA outlines measures to help curb and eliminate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. It is the prerogative of each State to legislate the rights of its citizens to possess or bear arms.

7. Is there an official definition of small arms and light weapons?

As the PoA does not provide a definition of small arms and light weapons, the closest the United Nations has come to an official definition is contained in the International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons ([A/60/88](#)), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 8 December 2005. In that document, “small arms and light weapons” mean any man-portable lethal weapon that expels or launches, is designed to expel or launch, or may be readily converted to expel or launch a shot, bullet or projectile by the action of an explosive.

“Small arms” are, broadly speaking, weapons designed for individual use. They include, *inter alia*, revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, sub-machine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns.

“Light weapons” are, broadly speaking, weapons designed for use by two or three persons serving as a crew, although some may be carried and used by a single person. They include, *inter alia*, heavy machine guns, hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns, recoilless rifles, portable launchers of anti-tank missile and rocket systems, portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems, and mortars of a caliber of less than 100 millimetres.

8. How many small arms and light weapons exist?

Experts estimate that there are more than 600 million small arms and light weapons in circulation worldwide.

9. What are the sources of illicit small arms and light weapons?

Illicit small arms and light weapons can come from a number of sources, including but not limited to:

- ◆ Illicit brokering
- ◆ Weapons left over from conflicts
- ◆ Illicit manufacturing
- ◆ Leakages from military and police stockpiles
- ◆ Smuggling
- ◆ Theft

10. What global instruments deal with the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons?

The trafficking in small arms and light weapons is addressed in three international instruments within the framework of the United Nations:

- the Programme of Action adopted in July 2001;

- a supplement to the International Convention on Transnational Organized Crime, the “Firearms Protocol”, which entered into force on 3 July 2005;
- and the international instrument to enable states to identify and trace illicit small arms and light weapons, adopted by the General Assembly in December 2005.

11. What is the United Nations Firearms Protocol and its relation to the Programme of Action?

In order to counter the growing threat of transnational organized crime, one of the major threats to human security impeding the social, economic, political and cultural development of societies worldwide, UN Member States agreed on a legally-binding convention which entered into force in September 2003. The Convention tackles the multi-faceted phenomenon of transnational organized crime, such as drug trafficking, trafficking in human beings, trafficking in firearms, smuggling of migrants and money laundering. It commits only the States which ratify it to take a series of measures against such crime.

These measures include the creation of domestic criminal offences to combat the problem, the adoption of frameworks for mutual legal assistance, extradition arrangements, law enforcement cooperation and technical assistance and training. The purpose of the Firearms Protocol*, which came into force in July 2005 as a supplement to the Convention, is to promote cooperation among States Parties to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition.

12. Does the PoA commit Member States to take action against arms brokers who sell guns illegally?

The PoA calls for States to develop national legislation or administrative procedures to regulate the activities of SALW brokers, including such measures as registration of brokers, licensing or authorization of brokering transactions as well as the appropriate penalties for all illicit brokering activities performed within the State's jurisdiction and control.

In 2006, upon the request of the General Assembly, a group of governmental experts (GGE) will study the problem of illicit brokering and make recommendations for action. One possible recommendation could be that States need to negotiate an international instrument to regulate illicit brokering.

13. What practical steps is the UN taking to help curb the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons?

The United Nations family of organizations carries out a number of practical actions to contribute to curbing the proliferation of illicit SALW:

- It provides, when requested, assistance to States in stockpile management and security;
- The UN also works with States to design, implement and monitor weapons collection and destruction programmes;
- It conducts upon invitation training workshops, conferences and capacity-building events, including specialized training of law enforcement officials;
- UN experts are dispatched, at the request of an interested State, to advise on ways to address

* Full title is: *Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*

national small arms problems and to assist with the establishment and functioning of national commissions on small arms;

- It assists States in their national reporting on the implementation of the Programme of Action;
- It serves as a forum for norm-building through regularly scheduled intergovernmental meetings and as a focus of activity for non-governmental organizations and research institutes;
- It assists, when needed, States in creating awareness-raising campaigns and popular education programmes in the framework of post-conflict building or the work of national small arms commissions.

The Secretary-General has established a mechanism to assist in the coordination of UN efforts to deal with all aspects of the trade in illicit small arms and light weapons and improve the quality of assistance provided to States and affected communities. The *Coordinating Action on Small Arms (CASA)* promotes consultation, exchange of information, the formulation of inter-agency projects and activities and the provision of joint contributions to meetings of States on SALW issues. The mechanism comprises 16 United Nations departments, agencies, funds and programmes.

14. What is the role of civil society in relation to the Programme of Action and during the Review Conference?

Civil society organizations (CSOs), in particular non-governmental organizations (NGOs), are encouraged to engage, where they deem it would be most useful, in aspects of international, regional and national efforts to implement the PoA. In the field of SALW, these organizations range from policy oriented groups, gun control organizations, sports shooting organizations, research institutes, aid organizations, human rights groups and faith-based organizations.

With respect to international conferences on the issue, civil society organizations representing the entire spectrum of debate on SALW have an equal opportunity to participate and present their views, including in a formal setting at which they have an opportunity to make public statements.

More information on the Review Conference can be found on www.un.org/smallarms2006

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