

# Disarmament and International Security Council



## Topic B :

### Assisting states in reducing the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons.

#### I. Introduction

Due to technological advancements and new developments of trafficking frameworks, the proliferation of illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons poses a grave issue to international peace and security, sustaining armed violence and crime globally (*Office for Disarmament Affairs*). Illicit markets and exchanges all over the world regarding small arms and light weapons are one of the sources of income of organised crime groups. Due to their low-cost and easy-to-distribute nature, these weapons easily bypass borders and import-export controls, possibly leading to the weapons falling into the hands of organised crime groups, cartels, extremist organisations or militias.

With the world facing a borderless wave of violence driven by small arms and light weapons, resulting in 48,000 UN-recorded conflict-related civilian deaths, illicit trade of these weapons are leading threats to world peace (*Mishra*). Different non-state armed groups use and

exploit the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons to network terrorism, control territory and expand general influence.

Furthermore, technological advancements catalyses the growing spread of 3D printed guns known as “ghost guns” which hold no serial numbers, excelling in illicit markets. These developments make illicit trade of weapons and small arms harder to trace.

In general, the United Nations calls for stronger small arms stockpile control and sustained, coordinated action between member states. The United Nations also puts a particular emphasis on the integration of small arms controls into peace operations and sanctions monitoring. “The weapons produced and transferred today risk fuelling the instability of tomorrow.” - Mr. Ebdo (Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs)

## **II. Definition of Key Terms**

Small arms and light weapons (SALW) : 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, projectile or bullet by the action of an explosive (*UNODC*).

Illicit Markets : A network for buying and selling illegal goods or services.

Arms Stockpile : A store of weapons or ammunition.

Stockpile Management : A management framework to protect the trade, transportation and handling of weapons and ammunition also preventing the arms falling into illicit use.

Non-state groups : Groups or ‘actors’ with influence, not affiliated with the state or national government.

Arms Tracing : A system that tracks the sales and purchases of firearms that has been registered with serial numbers.

### III. Background Information

Early actions of **legal** trafficking of small arms and light weapons emerged during the pre-Cold War time frame where European traders distributed small arms and light weapons to African and American markets in a ‘trade triangle’ between England, North America and Central Africa (*UNODC*).

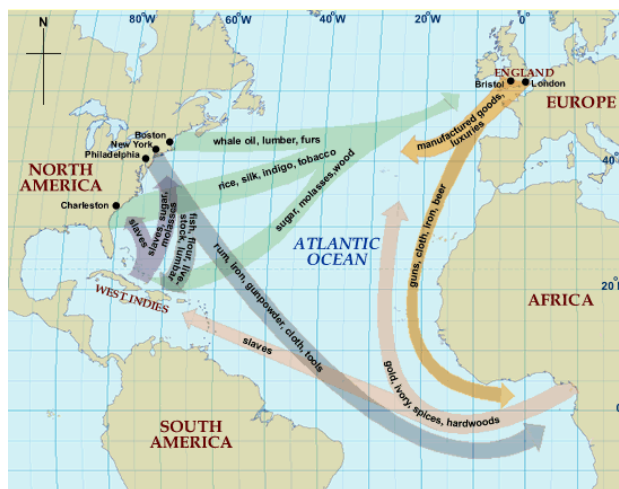


Figure 1.0 Triangular trade routes from England to North America to Africa. The National Archives.

In 1992, the Bosnian conflict intensified, creating a surge in small arms sales in illicit markets. Smuggled weapons were brought in for Soviet depots, producing money with high turnover rates.

In 2001, the United Nations established the United Nations Programme of Action (PoA). This was placed in action as an international effort to combat the illicit trade and trafficking of small arms and light weapons.

In 2005, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) implemented the International Tracing Instrument (ITI) to enable states to identify and trace illicit small arms and light weapons (*UNIDIR*).

In 2010, small arms and light weapons reached a concerningly reachable level for local gangs and non-state actors. The year saw a surge in gang violence and armed groups attacks where gang arsenals reached 2-10 million firearms (*The Small Arms Survey 2010*)

In the present day, the United Nations aims to reduce illicit trade and trafficking of small arms and light weapons by 2030, following the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda. The SDG goal 16, highlights the need to reduce these trades and trafficking of SALWs for peacekeeping.

#### **IV. Major countries and groups involved**

***United States*** : The United States is one of the world's largest manufacturers of small arms and light weapons. The United States would play a big role in the regulation of illicit trade and firearms exports. Its in-country small arms and light weapons policies differ from international regulations, making arms tracing and control more complicated.

***Russia*** : Russia is one of the world's largest manufacturers of small arms and light weapons. However, Russia does not disclose the purpose and value of these productions, limiting transparency. Russia is actively increasing exports of SALWs to Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russia has supplied a vast amount of SALWs to the front lines, some being diverted into civilian stockpiles.

***China*** : The Chinese government has always stated that China has ‘consistently supported and constructively participated in the governance of small arms and light weapons’ (Ambassador Fu). The state focuses on state to state exports and imports but focuses less on monitoring activities after the transfers.

***Iraq and Syria*** : The borders between Iraq and Syria remain large threats to the illicit trade and use of small arms and light weapons. Issues such as looted military stockpiles and the diversion of arms to extremist groups remain a primary concern regarding destabilisation.

***Latin America*** : The region of Latin America contains different groups that produce some of the highest homicide rates. Links between organised crime groups and drug trafficking organisations are a result of corruption and the illicit markets. Different non-state actors from Latin America frequently initiate cross-border smuggling operations under the radar.

***Somalia*** : As Somalia continues to face domestic and international issues regarding gangs, Pirates and organised crime groups, the tracing and control of arms both into and out of the state remains extremely weak. These illicit markets fuel trafficking, piracy and extremist groups. Arms control is a complex situation in this fragile state.

## **V. Possible Solutions**

*Calls for* the collaboration of member states regarding tighter control and tracing of illicit trades of small arms and light weapons,

*Encourages* the expansion of stability support in fragile states and areas such as Somalia or the borders of Iraq and Syria,

*Calls upon* the P5 members to closely monitor the distribution of small arms and light weapons between their borders,

*Supports* intelligence sharing workframes and agreements to control legislation of small arms and light weapons domestically,

## VI. Bibliography

“Small Arms and Light Weapons | United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs.” *Unoda.org*, 2025, [disarmament.unoda.org/en/our-work/conventional-arms/small-arms-and-light-weapons](https://disarmament.unoda.org/en/our-work/conventional-arms/small-arms-and-light-weapons).

“Document Viewer.” *Un.org*, 2025, [docs.un.org/en/A/74/187](https://docs.un.org/en/A/74/187). Accessed 15 Dec. 2025.

“Over 700 a Day Dying from Small Arms Fire; Main “Weapons of Choice” for Criminals and Terrorists | UN News.” *News.un.org*, 15 Dec. 2023, [news.un.org/en/story/2023/12/1144867](https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/12/1144867).

“Illicit Weapons Fuelling Conflicts Worldwide, Officials Warn.” *UN News*, 10 Nov. 2025, [news.un.org/en/story/2025/11/1166324](https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/11/1166324).

“The Firearms Protocol.” *United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime*, [www.unodc.org/unodc/firearms-protocol/the-firearms-protocol.html](https://www.unodc.org/unodc/firearms-protocol/the-firearms-protocol.html).

katharina.kiener-manu. "Firearms Module 3 Key Issues: History of Legitimate Arms Market." *Unodc.org*, 2020, [www.unodc.org/e4j/fr/firearms/module-3/key-issues/history-of-legitimate-arms-market.html](http://www.unodc.org/e4j/fr/firearms/module-3/key-issues/history-of-legitimate-arms-market.html).

Dyer, Theo. "The Illicit Arms Trade: Forever Wars in the Global South | Atlas Institute for International Affairs." *Atlas Institute for International Affairs*, 27 Aug. 2025, [atlasinstitute.org/the-illicit-arms-trade-forever-wars-in-the-global-south/](https://atlasinstitute.org/the-illicit-arms-trade-forever-wars-in-the-global-south/).

"Small Arms Survey 2010: Gangs, Groups, and Guns." *Www.smallarmssurvey.org*, 14 June 2010, [www.smallarmssurvey.org/resource/small-arms-survey-2010-gangs-groups-and-guns](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/resource/small-arms-survey-2010-gangs-groups-and-guns). Accessed 26 Apr. 2024.