Background

Small arms and light weapons (SALW) kill and injure more people on a daily basis worldwide than any other weapon. They are used in every act of armed violence from armed conflict to domestic violence. There is a multi-billion dollar industry surrounding the production, sale and trade, illicit traffic, and use of SALW and their ammunition.

In 2001, United Nations member states adopted a Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (UNPoA). The UNPoA is a non-legally-binding instrument that encourages states to develop programmes for collecting and destroying illegal weapons, strengthening import and export controls, raising awareness on the effects of illegal weapons, improving the security and safety of weapons storage facilities, and helping affected countries track down illegal transfers of small arms and the brokers involved. SALW were also included as a category of weapon covered by the Arms Trade Treaty, which entered into force on 24 December 2014.

Current context

The UNPoA and ATT have the potential to reduce and prevent the illicit trafficking and misuse of SALW. Implementation of the UNPoA at the national level has been effective in many countries. At the international level, there have also been some laudable developments. The establishment of the UN Trust Facility for Supporting Cooperation on Arms Regulation (UNSCAR) to support implementation of the UNPoA and ATT is also welcome development. The UN Security Council has adopted two resolutions in recent years— 2117 (2013) and 2220 (2015) underscore the need for the full and effective implementation of the UNPoA and provide for measures related to securing government stockpiles and weapons collection, among others. They also call for further measures to facilitate women’s full and meaningful participation in all policy making, planning, and implementation processes to combat and eradicate the illicit transfer, destabilizing accumulation, and misuse of small arms. In June 2015, a second meeting of government experts met in New York to discuss emerging technologies related to SALW that have implications for effective marking, record-keeping, and tracing of weapons, including 3D printing, polymer frames, and modular weapon systems.

Yet despite this activity, the commitment of governments to address SALW issues has seemingly diminished. A key challenge is that the resolutions on SALW at First Committee are virtually unchanged from year to year, giving a sense that the issue is stale and lacks urgency. Another challenge is that some states
seem reluctant to explore synergies between the UNPoA and ATT. And states largely seem to lack an appetite to address the crux of the SALW issue: manufacture and production.

While vitally important national and local work continues on implementing these instruments, it would be useful to revitalise some of the urgency and innovative thinking on SALW at the international level. All technical discussion and political will to control SALW should be checked against the purpose of reducing the impact of gun violence on people and communities. States should get rid of the narrow perspective of only controlling tools of violence per se and increase their understanding, action, and cooperation to address survivors needs and their input into this international processes, and the complementarity between SALW processes and the ongoing discussion to strengthen global commitments on sustainable development goals.

Recommendations for governments

**During First Committee:**
- Delegations should commend ongoing work to implement the UNPoA and to explore synergies and complementarities between it, the Arms Trade Treaty, and the sustainable development goals (SDGs) process. On the SDGs, they should indicate support for goal 16(4), which seeks to reduce illicit arms flows by 2030.
- Delegations should take a progressive view on the omnibus resolution on SALW and suggest language that involves action to strengthen implementation such as effective tracing programmes to address diversion of weapons to the illicit market, improving border surveillance, and strategic approaches to monitoring and implementing UN Security Council arms embargoes.
- Delegations could propose new SALW resolutions that address some of the UNPoA’s gaps such as assistance to survivors, ammunition, SALW production, stockpile management, and emerging technologies. States may want to make obligatory the submission of biennial national reports, as these are necessary for stocktaking. Only 36.6% of UN member states submitted reports in 2014 as compared to 2012’s 43.5%.

**Beyond First Committee:**
- States should propose a concrete way forward towards international controls of SALW ammunition—not only of its trade, but from production to destruction.
- States should develop initiatives to address challenges related to stockpile management standards, excessive arms production, and emerging technologies.
- States should call for the establishment of an independent mechanism to systematically measure and evaluate assistance, as well as UNPoA implementation so as to identify and fill in the gaps. Developing indicators will be a good first step to this end.