



PARLIAMENTARY FORUM  
ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

## **Policy Statement on the Stockpile Management of Conventional Ammunition**

Board of the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons,  
meeting in New York, USA, July 13, 2008

In almost all post-conflict environments, and in many developing countries, a physical risk exists to communities from the presence of abandoned, damaged or inappropriately stored and managed stockpiles of ammunition and explosives.

The problems arising from the conventional ammunition stockpiles are of growing concern to the international community. The global stockpile of conventional ammunition runs into many millions of tonnes, but accurate data on the exact scale of surplus is still limited. The magnitude of the problem is nevertheless illustrated by the increasing frequency of accidental explosive events within ammunition storage areas worldwide; since 2001 there have been 132 known explosive events in ammunition storage depots, resulting in over 3,273 fatalities and 3,809 injured.

Inappropriately managed and insecure national stockpiles of conventional ammunition therefore present an imminent threat to local communities and a security threat to societies and, ultimately, to national security. Hundreds die every year because of failures to maintain and manage deteriorating ammunition stockpiles. Many more die through the use of diverted conventional ammunition in conflict and by organised crime. The impact that such explosive events have on lives, livelihoods, housing and development is difficult to estimate; yet the costs of health care, explosive ordnance disposal clearance, environmental damage and loss of direct and indirect income are high. Additional costs are also incurred in maintaining and securing surplus stockpiles that are decaying and of little practicable military use, whilst valuable resources used to support these surplus stockpiles (land, facilities and equipment) could be converted to economically beneficial civilian use.

The group of potential stakeholders in the issue of conventional ammunition in surplus is also wide. The problem posed by conventional ammunition is an issue that transcends international borders and deserves an international response. Peace support operations also have a particular interest in effective stockpile management and security, particularly in post-conflict environments. Ammunition recovered during Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration programmes and during Small Arms Control programmes requires specialist handling and management. The presence of poorly managed stockpiles of conventional ammunition poses a

threat to peace support operations and a serious risk to peacekeeping personnel. Unsecured stockpiles may also be diverted for use in renewed conflict, crime and other armed violence.

The ammunition problem is largely a result of inadequate stockpile management policies and practices and, therefore has to be considered within the wider aspect of conventional ammunition stockpile management. States that do not effectively manage their national stockpiles are unable to monitor the quality and quantity of the conventional ammunition within them and are therefore unable to effectively address the accumulation of surplus. Ammunition that is ineffectively managed poses a significant risk as it may become unstable and threaten public safety due to explosion. Unsecured stockpiles also allow the diversion of ammunition to illicit uses, which can increase fatalities arising from armed crime and violence.

Despite these risks, conventional ammunition stockpiles continue to receive relatively little international attention. Stockpile management has not been addressed comprehensively in most relevant regional and global instruments. International agreements have tended to focus on particular aspects of the problem, such as the threats posed by specific weapons systems (for example MANPADS) or certain aspects of physical security. At the national level, many States do not have legislation, or sometimes even safe operational procedures, governing the safe and secure storage of conventional ammunition. In other cases, national legislation may be insufficient to ensure effective stockpile management, or States may fail to implement its provisions fully.

Accurate information on the location and size of national ammunition stockpiles is not readily available. States are often reluctant to disclose precise information about stockpiles for reasons of national security. Additionally, some countries do not maintain accurate ammunition accounts. This lack of detailed information on stockpile levels makes it difficult to assess the national, regional, and global dimensions of the problem and to develop a comprehensive policy to deal with it.

Effective systems are therefore necessary to cover all operating procedures relating to accurate accounting, safe and secure storage, safe transportation and appropriate handling of ammunition and explosives. Since conventional ammunition contains explosives and pyrotechnic substances, effective stockpile management is essential and justifies increasing international attention of the issue. The inherent instability of many types of ammunition (containing propellant) poses specific safe handling and storage requirements. Disposal, destruction or demilitarization also requires specialist training and facilities. These considerations are best addressed within a comprehensive stockpile management system, such as 'whole life management', which covers all the procedures and operations required for safe and secure management of ammunition.

States also incur costs when they retain large stockpiles of ammunition. Large stockpiles consist of high volumes per unit area and therefore significant storage costs. There are also the inherent safety and security risks, which come at a cost. The use of cost benefit analysis means that the real costs of storage and security can be accurately estimated; which include, staff salaries, capital depreciation of infrastructure and assets, operating costs, and fuel and electricity charges. A cost benefit analysis of these costs over an identified storage period, compared against the costs of disposal, can demonstrate long-term cost savings. In many cases surplus disposal, rather than retention, appears therefore to be a cost-effective, safe and secure option.

## *Objectives*

**The Board of the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons, meeting in New York, USA, July 13, 2008:**

*Recognizes* that it is the prerogative of each State to assess its conventional ammunition requirements in accordance with its national security needs, and acknowledges their legitimate requirement for reasonable and appropriate stockpile levels of conventional ammunition, in accordance with the resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2006 (A/Res/61/72);

*Acknowledges* the risks and hazards that insecure or unsafe stockpiles of conventional ammunition present to individuals, community and society, and the negative impact that this can have on lives, livelihoods, housing and development;

*Encourages* the development, implementation and the enforcement of national legislation, supported by effective operational procedures, to ensure the safe, effective and efficient stockpile management of conventional ammunition, and encourages parliaments and governments who have passed the appropriate national legislation to make their experience available to third States, thus contributing to the implementation of the Programme of Action on SALW;

*Supports* the members of the Forum and their parliamentarian colleagues to formulate legislative and regulatory frameworks for effective stockpile management of conventional ammunition and to develop effective mechanisms for control and oversight in order to better ensure that individuals and communities are not placed at risk due to ineffective stockpile management of conventional ammunition;

*Takes note* of the fact that as yet there are no international convention or coordination mechanisms that in a comprehensive way develops an integrated international response to the problems caused by the accumulation of stockpiles of conventional ammunition; NATO Parliamentary Assembly, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Inter Parliamentary Union ought to be involved continuously to strive towards such international convention;

*Welcomes* the work undertaken by the Group of Governmental Experts on the issue of problems arising from the accumulation of conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus, established pursuant to UN General Assembly Resolution 61/72 and *encourages* that their detailed recommendations are implemented in full when published and that results should be monitored by the UN Group of Governmental Experts;

*Supports* efforts on the regional level to pursue information exchange mechanisms and program to improve the standards of conventional ammunition stockpile management, which in turn can inform a international response to the issue;

*Urges* donors to deepen their political and financial engagement with program and projects designed to improve the standards of stockpile management of conventional ammunition; and in particular those program and projects that are engaged in surplus destruction;

*Recommends*, as complimentary to legislation and regulation mechanisms, operational oversight structures are established or strengthened, such as developing the capacity of an Ombudsperson or

Parliamentary Committees elected by the national parliament, to improve control of stockpiles of conventional ammunition; and

*Mandates* the Board and the Secretariat to follow the development of the issue of stockpiles of conventional ammunition and take action in line with the adopted policy; and in particular awareness-raising measures on the issue of stockpiles of conventional ammunition should be included in the program work of the Forum an

*Considers* the need to increase international cooperation programs for secure storage and destruction by simultaneously addressing the international community of states to promote safe and secure management and destruction of SALW and other conventional ammunition stocks.

## **Sources**

Sources for the content of this statement are primarily from; 1) Conventional Ammunition in Surplus - A Reference Guide, Small Arms Survey, 2008, (ISBN 8-8288-0092-X); 2) Targeting Ammunition, Small Arms Survey, Geneva, 2006, (ISBN 2-8288-0072-5); and 3) Biting the Bullet 18, Ammunition Stocks - Promoting Safe and Secure Storage and Disposal, International Alert et al, 2005, (ISBN 1898702-63-2).

Conventional ammunition can be described as '*a complete device charged with explosives, propellants, pyrotechnics or initiating composition for use in connection with defence, offence, training or non operational purposes, including those parts of weapons systems containing explosives*'.

The United Nations General Assembly first took up the question of conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus in 2004, when it adopted decision 59/515 of 3 December 2004, which included the issue in the agenda of its 60th session. In 2005, the General Assembly adopted resolution 60/74 of 8 December 2005, encouraging Member States to assess their conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus and promoting assistance and international cooperation with regard to stockpile management issues. In 2006, the General Assembly adopted resolution 61/72 of 6 December 2006, by which a Group of Governmental Experts was established.

Data estimated as at 01 May 2008.

United Nations General Assembly. 1999. *Report of the Group of Experts on the problem of ammunition and explosives*. A/54/155 of 29 June. para. 59-61.

Cf. United Nations Institute for Disarmament and Research. 2006. *Costs of Disarmament - Cost Benefit Analysis of SALW Destruction versus Storage*. Geneva: UNIDIR.

United Nations General Assembly Resolution 61/72 of 6 December 2006.