

## Side event on Parliamentary oversight of stockpile management of conventional ammunition, held during the United Nations Third Biennial Meeting of States on the Program of Action on SALW on Monday 14 July

### Report

The Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons held a side event on Monday the 14<sup>th</sup> of July during the Third Biennial Meeting of States to Consider 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 on Parliamentary oversight of stockpile management of conventional ammunition

Inappropriately managed and insecure national stockpiles of conventional ammunition present an imminent threat to local communities and a security threat to societies. Casualties resulting from failures to maintain and manage deteriorating ammunition stockpiles in addition to the risks inherent in the illicit use of diverted conventional ammunition are significant threats to national security, heeding the attention and engagement of parliamentarians worldwide.

Speakers during the event were Raphael Chegeni, Member of Parliament, Tanzania, Peter Weiderud, Secretary General of the Parliamentary Forum as well as Adrian Wilkinson, Technical Consultant for the Parliamentary Forum.

Peter Weiderud opened the session by welcoming the speakers and the participants and gave a short introduction to the Parliamentary Forum. He explained that the Parliamentary Forum is the only international organization for parliamentarians with the specific objective of preventing armed violence and small arms proliferation and gave a short summary of the development of the work of the Forum over the last few years. Members of the Forum come from national as well as regional parliaments and also from sub-national parliaments. Any parliamentarian interested in SALW issues can become a member of the Forum. The strongest regional representation is in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa and Western Europe.

Weiderud then gave the floor to Technical Expert Adrian Wilkinson who presented a power point presentation on the issue. The presentation started with Wilkinson showing the audience a table over all ammunition explosions that have happened over the last years. The sheer quantity of incidents was astonishing as well as the number of deaths and casualties. The first example brought up had occurred in Bharatpur Ammunition Depot, India on the 28 April 2000 and had resulted in 5 fatalities the evacuation of 10,000 people. On top of this US\$ 90M of stock was destroyed. The grass surrounding the depot where the fire had started had not been cut for 2 years as a cost saving measure.

He highlighted the case of Lagos, Nigeria in 2002. In this case the ammunition depot was situated in the centre of the town and therefore had devastating consequences on the buildings in the area. Many people were killed while crossing a canal as they escaped from the blasts.

Novobogdanovka, Ukraine, 2004, was another example. The depot contained 92 000 tonnes of ammunition which far exceeds regular European depots.

In Paracin, Serbia 2006, the explosion occurred only 600 m from a main road. After the incident the road was blocked off for 32 hours which meant that around 15 million Euros worth of trade was lost. This is a clear example of how these incidents can have very negative indirect effects.

When explosions happen ammunition is cast around and a lot of undetonated munitions lay around waiting to explode. This of course constitute an enormous hazard for people living in the area, especially for children who may pick up the undetonated munitions out of curiosity.

One of the most severe incidents occurred in Malhuzine, Mozambique in 2007 where over 100 people were killed. In this case the hospital was located only 1.5 km from the depot which meant not only that some parts of the building were destroyed but also that undetonated munitions ended up inside the building. The casualties were in this sense taken to another hazardous place.

Mr Wilkinson explained the so called chemical stability of the explosives and that ammunition will eventually expire. In Eastern Europe during 2006 and 2007 there has been a series of explosions taken place. This trend is quite easy to explain since all the ammunition has the same age and therefore expired about the same time. The question then is when and where is the next.

Ammunition is not cheap and neither is proper management of it. However the costs are even higher when it goes wrong.

In order to introduce the subject from a parliamentary perspective, Wilkinson highlighted some key points which parliamentarians can do, which included;

- Establish a legislative framework for safe and secure ammunition storage.
- Engage the Security and Defence Committee in the issue.
- Initiate international cooperation by visiting 'best practice' ammunition storage.
- Ensure compliance with appropriate international instruments relating to conventional ammunition stockpiles.
- Advocate for budget necessary to ensure safe and secure ammunition stockpiles.

The floor was the given to Honourable Raphael Chegeni, Member of Parliament of Tanzania. He thanked Mr Wilkinson for his technical introduction.

MP Chegeni started this presentation by once again pointing to the explosions in Mozambique which is one out of many recent examples about the importance of secure and proper stock piling of ammunitions. He also mentioned the SADC sub regional meeting held by the Forum in Maputo in March 2008 where the topic was discussed.

With this follows also a need for increased parliamentary oversight of ammunitions storage facilities. During the last few months there has been an increased awareness of this within the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons.

The role of parliamentarians in ensuring that their respective governments follow international norms is in part based on the transparency of the latter in sharing information on the ammunition storage sites; often this information is viewed as a matter of national security and seldom shared.

When storage sites are known, the local population needs to be made aware of the hazards and ideally, have an emergency response plan in place. The same response plan established for natural disasters could be used as a reference.

There are no international standards, including within the UN system, regarding the storage of ammunition. There are also no coordination mechanisms that in a comprehensive way develop an integrated international response to the problems caused by the accumulation of stockpiles of conventional ammunition.

An alternative are the NATO standards that follow the UN classification of risks for ammunition and explosives. According to these principals the *minimum* distance to public traffic routes and inhabited building (3,400 meters) for Hazard Division 1.1 ammunition (mass explosion hazard).

The need for greater parliamentary oversight and control on the topic was highlighted and the meeting called on MPs to follow through with their obligations to implement international instruments like the SADC protocol which regulates these issues. The need for more resource allocation to safety and security at the disposition of parliamentarians and raised the need for greater transparency from security and defense agencies, was also underlined.

MP Chegeni then referred to the recently adopted Forum policy statement on the topic and went through the objectives of the statement. Please see attached Policy Statement on Stockpile Management of Conventional Ammunition.

The floor was then opened for questions and debate.

The first question was aimed at Wilkinson and regarded prioritisation and if you have limited recourses, what are the first measures to be taken.

Wilkinson explained that there are many simple and inexpensive methods to start off with. One of them is to make sure that distance limits are kept, which is often not the case in overfilled depots. If one explosion take place it is likely to set others off as well. To conduct chemical testing of the propellants is also very important. There are costs involved but they will give early warnings.

Wilkinson also explained that there has not been a very high interest among donors to support programs related to stockpile management of conventional ammunition.

MP Christer Winbäck, Sweden asked whether these explosions usually come as a surprise to the countries' defence ministers. The answer given by Wilkinson was that the ministers often do not have the capacity to investigate.

A representative from Brazilian NGO Viva Rio explained that legislation in many Latin American countries is very general and do not cover particular technical aspects.

A question was then raised regarding the Parliamentary Forum role on the issue. Secretary General of the Forum, Peter Weiderud explained the background of the statement. Forum Board member MP Manuel de Araujo (Mozambique) was concerned about what had happened in his country and decided to bring the issue to the Forum for discussion. This way the issue was put on the agenda and discussed for the first time during the SADC conference in Maputo mentioned above.

A former member of parliament from Fiji now working for an NGO on SALW highlighted the need to bring ammunition storage issues into SSR programs. Wilkinson answered that this had been the case in some programs.

An IANSA representative then stated that although he thought that the Parliamentary Forum was a good initiative and he welcomed the adopted policy statement, he was worried of what could actually be done on the ground.

Weiderud answered that of course, policy is useless if it is not put into practice. The strength of policy statement lies in that it is a reflexion of the wisdom of parliamentarians from all over the world. He gave the example of cluster munitions. The parliamentarians who participated in the negotiations had a statement adopted by many parliamentarians behind their arguments instead of just their own individual input.

MP Chegeni continued by saying that parliamentarians can indeed forward the issue on the political agenda and have the capacity to get the governments' attention. However, NGOs also need to play their part and bring the issues they want discussed to Member of Parliament's attention.

Weiderud brought up the example of Mozambique once again and highlighted that MP de Araujo had made the Forum aware of the issue as well as his fellow Mozambican parliamentary colleagues. He then used an international context to further the agenda in Mozambique and in the rest of the SADC region.

A representative from UN ODA highlighted the need for proper legislation and also proper record keeping. A representative from Safer World said that apart from legislation, which is the obvious task for parliamentarians, they have indeed also another important role to play and that is surveillance i.e. to actually visit depots to investigate standards.

MP Hans Raidel, Germany stated that many states do not have the resources it is therefore unrealistic to have very high ambitions. We should start by implementing minimal standards. Big countries also need to take leading positions. MP Chegeni also said that parliamentarians need more training seminars since if they are supposed to have oversight they must have an idea of what they are over-sighting.

Wilkinson finished the discussions by highlighting once again the importance of investing in proper management. Some very simple things can be done such as cutting the grass around the depot and making staff stop smoking in the facilities. Although some more technical measures such as testing may be expensive at first, the costs of the consequences when things go wrong are far more expensive.

## *Annex 1*

### **Draft 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.

**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 parliamentary 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 an 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.