

Seminar July 16, 2008 Washington DC, USA at the Friends Committee on National Legislation Parliamentary Forum

The seminar was an opportunity for the Parliamentary Forum to present its work in the USA by involving staff of US congressmen as well as Civil Society in the discussion of Privatisation of Security, Ammunition Stockpile management as well as introducing the international parliamentary small agenda in a broader context.

In attendance were:

Michael Kuiken, Professional Staff, Senate Armed Services Committee
Caleb Rossiter, Professional Staff, Congressman Bill Delahunt
Geoff Thale, Washington Office on Latin America
Adriana, Washington Office on Latin America
Colby Goodman, Amnesty International USA
Joe Volk, Friends Committee on National Legislation
Dan Allen, FCNL
Lora Lumpe, FCNL
Trevor Keck, FCNL
Representative of the Institute for Policy Studies
Daniel Volman, Africa Security Research Centre
Hon. Gen. (Rtd.) Joseph Nkaissery, Assistant Minister of Defence Kenya
Hon. MP. Hans Raidel, Member of Parliament, Germany
Hon. MP. Christer Winbäck, Member of Parliament, Sweden
Teresa Dybeck, Parliamentary Forum on SALW
Peter Weiderud, Parliamentary Forum on SALW

Introduction

Mr. Weiderud opened the seminar by thanking Mr Volk, Mrs Lumpe and the Friends Committee on National Legislation for co-hosting the event as well as serving as liaisons for the Forum in the USA.

He gave a short introduction to the Parliamentary Forum, its work, history and development. He then gave the floor to MP Raidel who gave a presentation on Stockpile Management of Conventional Ammunition.

MP Raidel

The progress in implementing the PoA in relation to ammunition remains inadequate. This is partly because it has too often been considered as a residual category. We had to experience that control and reduction of ammunition raise their own distinct and challenging issues.

MP Raidel highlighted some important points as to stockpile management of conventional ammunition. The problem is threefold: Risk of loss and diversion, safety hazards and safe disposal and destruction of ammunition.

MP Raidel spoke about the German situation with regard to how his country administers and secures ammunition stockpiles. Law making in the field of war weaponry is a matter of exclusive Federal legislation. Public ammunition stockpiles fall under the responsibility of the Federal Ministries of Defence (Federal Armed Forces), the Ministries of the Interior (police forces) and Finance (customs administration).

In the MoD ammunition is verified during its entire lifetime so that it can be traced from leaving the factory to use or disposal. Ammunition is as a matter of principle stored in Federal Armed Forces depots with storehouses covered with earth ("igloos"). These igloos conform to legal and military infrastructure requirements. They are checked annually by military security personnel.

Normally ammunition is not re-used. Only in a few exceptional cases is small calibre ammunition sold to friendly nations. Transfer to national producers for recycling, for instance as exercise ammunition or the re-use of components, while not excluded on principle, is currently only carried out in a few cases where this has proven to be economical.

He also pointed out that in Germany the Parliament and the Government work in very close relations.

MP Raidel concluded his presentation by stressing the importance that the USA takes a leading role. Europe alone cannot solve the problem.

Third Biannual Meeting of States (MP Winbäck)

MP Winbäck gave a brief introduction to the BMS and its origins in the Program of Action as well as the key issues for this year; reducing illicit arms brokering, improving management of stockpiles as well as strengthening international cooperation and assistance

A large number of states and NGOs from around the world have gathered. Many host side events on specific issues. He explained the poor outcome of the last conference but that there were hopes for that this conference would have a better dialogue, and therefore better possibilities to adopt a final document.

The Chair of the event emphasises the importance of international cooperation since one country cannot do much alone since the illicit trade of arms cross borders. He also explained that the Swedish delegation rely a lot on NGOs and the Forum for information and expertise. He also stressed the hope that USA would take part in the negotiations.

Mr Weiderud explained that there are some specific differences between WMD and SALW work. In the case of WMD it is the rest of the world against 5 or 8 nuclear states. When it comes to SALW every country is part of the problem and the solution. Another observation is that while a lot of the political energy against WMD comes from the political left with SALW there is a strong commitment from the whole of the political spectra. This is important to highlight when working with the US.

Hon. Gen Nkaiserry

The floor was then given to Hon. Gen Nkaiserry who held a short introduction to some of the main challenges related to SALW in Africa

The role of parliamentarians in Africa is in part regulation but also the responsibility to inform the people. One issue in Africa is that the region does not produce arms themselves but still there are a lot of arms in this conflict struck region. There is a lack of capacity among parliamentarians on how to deal with the issues and monitor the flow of arms as well as the final destruction of arms. Also most arms have once been legal but have then ended up on the illegal market and also go from one conflict to another. The Parliamentary Forum is a great source when it comes to capacitating parliamentarians and raising their awareness in the region. With increased capacity the parliamentarians have the possibility to push their governments. He especially pointed to the ATT.

Mr. Weiderud also talked about the growing trend of Privatisation of Security which is a new issue for the Forum. However, poor national legislation and limited international conventions and structures have an impact on human rights. It also questions the state monopoly of the use of force. Other aspects are that security should be provided as a common good but in this new context security is only available to those who can afford it. The issue of Privatisation of Security is new to the Forum but there has been a growing interest among the members.

Some of the questions that were raised during the discussions were;

Rebel groups – these groups are often interested in the chaos since there is a lucrative business related to arms trade. The answer given was that the Forum can only address the principal of arms control. The strength of the Forum is to provide an international context. From a national perspective what the Forum can do is to assist in improving national legislation etc. However working with individual countries as such may be more complicated.

Another important topic brought up was that in order to work with the US Congress it is necessary to be very specific and in a simple way explain the main objectives, main policy etc. One answer to this maybe that the rest of the world needs the USA to get involved in the international processes. With regards to supply and demand one can of course say that demand can be stimulated but there is a need to address the main producing countries as well.

The issue of tracking arms was also highlighted as an important part where the USA needs to be involved. Tracking weapons would benefit the USA since everyone can agree that we do not want arms to circulate uncontrolled and eventually end up in the wrong hands. The participants were informed that the USA had planned to take part in that particular discussion during the UN conference but at the time of the seminar this had not been confirmed yet.

The need for international frameworks and not just national legislation was once again highlighted since arms cross borders. The presence of the USA is in this sense very important in order to find these conventions. Mr Weiderud also added that there are a number of issues where the cost of the US involvement would be very low but the international community would have a lot to gain. The current lack of US involvement, which probably is a result of the lack of confidence in the UN, is a problem for the rest of the world.

The invited participants explained that in the USA there is no real, strong disarmament movement but rather a movement for regulation.

With regards to stockpile management of conventional ammunitions, the fact that there are no common international standards was also brought up and discussed. The only one is NATO but their standards primarily apply well to wealthy states. However there are some very simple things can be done such as cutting the grass around the depot and making staff stop smoking in the facilities.

The question to whether there are any positive aspects of privatisation of security was also discussed. There are conventions regarding mercenaries but at the moment there are no international conventions regulating private security companies. Mr. Weiderud pointed out that it is unrealistic to think that these companies cannot contribute in a positive way. The first step would be to have national regulation but we also need international standards since a private security company may be operating in one country but be based in another which often can lead to difficulties when it comes to accountability.

The issue of privatisation of security may not be a huge problem in Sweden or the USA but it is a great problem in Latin America and Africa. The industry will continue to grow and there has been a dramatic increase after 9/11.

Mr. Weiderud referred to the Forum Policy Statement on the topic which he thought would be able to provide some answers. He also stated that Private Security Companies must also play their part. They need to formulate codes of conduct since there will always be loopholes in national legislation and particularly when more than one country is involved.