



PARLIAMENTARY FORUM  
ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

## Secretary general's report

Geneva, 19 October 2015

It is a true pleasure to greet you all Honourable Members of the Board of the Parliamentary Forum. I am looking forward to share this report that reflects highlights of vital activities realised by the Forum, where many of you and other members have played a crucial role, during the course of year 2015. Later during the meeting we will have a more forward-looking session; focusing on potential strategic development of the Forum, where your input will be decisive. It will also be important to discuss and get your orientation regarding the financial situation of the Forum. It has proved somewhat challenging to convene board meetings in 2015. As you know this meeting was scheduled to take place in Brussels on 5 of May in conjunction with the seminar planned at the European Parliament and hosted by our member MEP Ana Gomes. Following Mrs Gomes recommendations, the seminar had to be postponed several times and the Secretariat is now following up on the matter with the aim to realise the seminar in the future.

While the board has not been able to meet as a group, each individual member has on the other hand been very active and taken part in close to all activities held since the beginning of the year. I very much appreciate the reports you have shared.

Another reason is the gap between the Secretary Generals between March and September where we in the end though best to wait as there were no immediately urgent issues.

After almost 8 years Secretary General Peter Weiderud left the Forum to re-join the Swedish Foreign Ministry and take up his new role as director of the Swedish Institute in Alexandria, Egypt. Working with a broad mandate of dialogue between Europe and the MENA region on human rights, peace, culture and environment, there will hopefully be opportunities for future cooperation. He has already generously offered to co-host one of our MENA meetings for next year.

The recruitment process for the new Secretary general was led by our President Ala Talabani and Board Member Christer Winbäck, as accounted for earlier.

Let me start this report by sharing some details on activities held since our last meeting.

The Arms Trade Treaty continues to be one of our main areas of work. 77 countries have now ratified the ATT and many Forum members are working hard to push their respective countries to ratify.

The Forum has taken part in several of the preparatory meetings throughout the year, including the last Preparatory Meeting towards the First Conference of State Parties, that took place in Geneva July 6-8, and the First Conference of State Parties, that took place in Cancun in late August 24-27. The rules of procedure have been decided, together with the location of the Secretariat and the selection of a Head of Secretariat until the Second Conference of State Parties, Mr. Simeon Dumisani Dadla. However, decisions are still being made in terms of the financing mechanisms of the ATT, provisional reporting templates were adopted together with the creation of an informal working group on reporting.

In general, the process was dominated by the discussion of the substantive and political issues such as the seat of the secretariat, the reporting templates, rules of procedure and financing mechanism. The importance of universalization and implementation was always highlighted, but no parliamentary component was included in the discussions or side events. Forum Member Hon. Senator Laura Rojas from Mexico, proposed the organisation of a parliamentary side event at the First Conference of State Parties, however, it was postponed until further notice. The importance of parliamentary work in the correct implementation of the Treaty has to be highlighted and actions have to be taken to increase the inclusion of parliamentarians in the ongoing implementation process and the existing international capacity building initiatives. In this respect, the Forum has an added value, and the Secretariat is closely following the development of the process.

The Forum is also pleased to offer support to members for activities aimed at promoting signing and ratification of the Treaty. During 2015 several national activities have been held.

In March 2015, the Forum organised a seminar in Benin. We are pleased that the majority of participants became members of the Forum and we will continue to work with them in order to support the legislators to promote a speedy ratification.

Activities were also held in Brazil, Kenya, Peru and Swaziland. Forum has contributed to some concrete achievements including Seychelles, South Africa and Togo ratifying the ATT where our members played a role. Great progress was made with sceptic countries Nicaragua, Venezuela and Zimbabwe where the latter signed and we have activities planned for the former later this year.

We know that our Board Member Hon. Betty Amongi has been very active in Uganda and we appreciated her report. I would also like to mention the instrumental role played by our consultants Joseph Dube and Martin Kerkula for their work in the Africa region, in facilitating these activities.

In January, Board Member Hon. Drissa Sanogo and Forum staff were invited to take part in the conference *"Fight against trafficking of conventional arms - actors, assistance, cooperation"* organised by Thomas More Institute in Paris and the French Ministry for Defence. The joint presentation covered the Forum's works around the ATT.

Conferences on ATT and UNPoA: In May, approximately one year after our inter- regional conference in Lomé, *"Enhancing ATT and UNPoA Implementation through South-South Parliamentary Exchange and Cooperation"*, Forum members from Africa and Latin America once again met to discuss the mutually reinforcing instruments ATT and UNPoA. This time it was held in Peru, Lima in cooperation with the Congress of Peru and the UN Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNLIREC).

Board Member José Figueroa had a vital role in chairing the meeting. A very good number of members attended and again there was a strong presence of African parliamentarians – 14 of 23 – of which many were sponsored by their home parliaments, showing a strong commitment amongst African states. However, given the location of the conference, the relatively low number of members participating from the LAC region – 9 from Central and South America and none from the Caribbean - needs to be discussed.

Caribbean: A month later we held another ATT/UNPoA conference, this time inviting MPs from the Caribbean. The seminar was very generously hosted by the Parliament of Jamaica. The conference focused on recognizing the important role that Island States are playing in shaping the Arms Trade Treaty to reflect their concerns. This meeting was again chaired by Hon. José Figueroa.

Again, it proved a real challenge to secure participation from Caribbean parliamentarians and of the 15 CARICOM states only 5 were present and for the future, we need to understand the reasons in order to work effectively in the region which continues to be heavily affected by armed violence. In some cases we faced practical problems such as elections or budget discussions or the mere lack of functioning contact details. . It should also be remembered that, with the exception of Cuba and Dominican Republic, most parliaments are very small with only around 30 legislators, making assigning MPs to travel a greater investment.

Nevertheless we were content that the countries that are worst affected by armed violence were present and we ensured good quality content. When we revise our strategy for any future work with the region, we need to better underline the shared responsibilities states have in implementing the ATT – regardless if they are effected by armed violence or not. Let us discuss this aspect as part of the later session upon future strategic direction of the Forum.

We also now have an invitation from the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago for cooperation in 2016 and I would like to hear your thoughts on this later. For instance, it could serve as venue for our General Assembly which has never been held in this region. There are however logistical aspects to consider.

The ATT/UNPoA seminar for Portuguese speaking countries, held in cooperation with the Parliament of Portugal in June, on the other hand achieved a good number of participants, although it again was difficult to secure participation from Latin America. The participants came from Timor Leste and all 5 African Lusophone countries with MPs from Angola, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal, São Tomé e Príncipe as well as representatives from civil society in Cape Verde. The meeting also aimed to provide a forum for exchanges of experiences between Small Island States and as there is a clear overlap, MPs from the Comoros, Maldives and Seychelles also joined the meeting. Board Member Drissa Sanogo chaired this meeting which was highly appreciated and I would also like to mention that our former Vice President Dr. Manuel de Araujo from Mozambique joined the meeting to chair sessions and share his wide experience in working with the Forum as well as the ATT.

Middle East and North Africa continues to be an important region for the Forum. As you remember, last year we held our General Assembly and a regional meeting at the Parliament of Jordan and work has continued with the same intensity in 2015.

A number of members of the Forum, including Board Member Hon. Sahar Qawasmi participated actively in a conference on Arms Control in the Middle East in February in Beirut, organized by the Permanent Peace Movement (PPM). The conference highlighted the most important international instruments of conventional weapons control. As the then Secretary General of the Forum, Peter Weiderud held a presentation to stress the importance of parliamentary oversight of the implementation of these instruments.

In the end of year 2015, or in the beginning of next year, we will be holding another regional meeting for MENA. The Secretariat is currently exploring the most feasible location, based on political and logistical aspects.

I can also mention that funding has been secured for two seminars in 2016, that will draw on the lessons learned from the previous events on the matter.

The Western Balkans: Since our regional meeting in 2014 we have continued to follow up with members in the region, although funding continues to be a challenge. The Senior advisor to the Joint Committee for Defence and Security Policy of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr Željko Grubešić, represented the Parliamentary Forum at a workshop on Physical Security and Stockpile Management (PSSM), in Zagreb, Croatia in March 2015.

Somaliland: Peter Weiderud, as Secretary General of the Forum, was invited to Hargeisa, Somaliland, in March to – along with the Danish Demining Group (DDG) and the Regional Centre for Small Arms (RECSA) – lead a workshop and capacity building session focusing on issues related to small arms and light weapons for members of the Somaliland Parliament. The cooperation proved fruitful and suggestions were made to involve the Horn of Africa region into the Forum's work. Funding for this has been secured and will take place in 2016.

South Asia: On April 9, the Forum held its first ever seminar in India. The Seminar "*Illegal Trade of Small Arms: Effects on Society - Role of Parliamentarians*" took place in Hyderabad and was organized in collaboration with the Indian Institute for Peace, Disarmament & Environmental Protection. The only MP present was the Cabinet Central Minister of Labour and Employment, Government of India who became a member of the Forum. Although the meeting presented a good opportunity to discuss the issue of SALW in the region with several actors, the meeting did not attract the presence of parliamentarians as expected. Other methods will be needed to get their attention and my suggestion is that we discuss this challenge in the forward-looking session later at the Board Meeting.

Swedish Parliament: As part of an initiative to increase Swedish parliamentarians' engagement in the issue of SALW and arms export control, the Forum arranged a seminar in the Swedish Parliament in April which was chaired by Board Member Christer Winbäck. Swedish MPs, representatives from Civil Society, and invited experts discussed arms exports, parliamentary scrutiny and the ATT. A few months later, during the largest political gathering of the year in Sweden, representatives from the recently ended parliamentary inquiry-committee on Swedish arms export participated in a seminar to discuss the results presented by the committee in June. The seminar was arranged jointly by the Forum and Swedish CSOs.

As you can see the ATT and the UNPoA have dominated our discussions and work this year. Our indicators tell us that the international community, including donors, are still prioritising ATT over UNPoA. With regards to the UNSCAR fund we have heard that the grant may soon be divided up with one pot for ATT and one for UNPoA. I find it relevant to highlight the potential for both of the instruments and that it makes sense not have the instruments compete for funding.

Having said that, the Forum has given space for the UNPoA at all three conferences and highlighted the public health debate developed together with our new partners International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), as these sessions were very much appreciated by the participants. We are also working closely with the Small Arms Survey which is an excellent source of knowledge on the topic.

The Convention on Cluster Munitions is another disarmament instrument which has received special attention in 2015. This work has been supported by the Cluster Munition Coalition both financially and in substance. Members have been encouraged to engage and to promote ratification of the convention. Members in Liberia have done an exceptionally good job and ratification is now close. We expect to hold a smaller number of national activities on the topic this autumn and also add it to our agenda for our upcoming MENA meeting as well as the IPU side event. We made considerable efforts in securing members participation at the 1st Review Conference of the CCM, September in Dubrovnik, Croatia.

133<sup>rd</sup> IPU Assembly, October 20th 2015, Geneva; the Forum will hold a side-event in collaboration with Small Arms Survey (SAS) and Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC) with the focus on “Protecting civilians from armed violence – the role of parliamentarians”.

EUROLAT: The Forum was again invited to the Euro- Latin American Parliamentary Assembly to hold a presentation. This time we addressed the Committee on Political Affairs, Security and Human Rights, rather than forming part of the NGO session as previous years. Board Member Hon. José Figueroa Aguilar and Forum staff gave a presentation on "Parliamentary control on arms transfers between the European Union and Latin America and the Arms Trade Treaty" at Assembly held at the Latin American Parliament in Panama City in March.

Parlatino: Board Member José Figueroa represented the Forum at the XXX General Assembly of the Latin American Parliament, in May 2015. His attendance served to confirm the importance that the region has for the Forum, as well as witness the election of Hon. Senator Blanca Alcalá as new president of the Parlatino.

#### Financial situation

Funding: The Forum has managed to broaden and diversify its financing base during recent years and had in general a good level of funding for 2014 and 2015, with core funding from Sida complimented by project funding from UNSCAR, Folke Bernadotte Academy and the Cluster Munition Coalition. The CMC grant was increased from USD 500 in 2014 to USD 2500 in 2015 which, albeit a smaller sum, shows trust in the work of the Forum.

It is important to highlight the in-kind support we received from the various parliaments where our activities are held as well as their investments in securing parliamentary participation in our activities as well as other disarmament fora.

Our ambition is that this situation will continue in 2016, maybe with an additional one or two new donors or renewed cooperation with former partners. Funding from Folke Bernadotte Academy for 2016 has already been approved for 2 seminars for the MENA and Horn of Africa and we have submitted a new proposal to UNSCAR to extend the project to promote the ATT/UNPoA through South-South parliamentary cooperation. We should have an answer to this in November. We are currently awaiting decision on a grant from, the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and the German Foreign Office and we are still following up on the proposal submitted to DfID in 2013. Unfortunately, we were recently informed that our application to UN Women was rejected. However, as our application was assessed as relevant to UN Women and got to the final round of their internal assessment, we are aiming for achieving this support in the future.

In relation to DfID we are stressing the outcome of the recently conducted inquiry of the International Development Committee into Parliamentary Strengthening, which the Forum contributed to. The report concluded that working with parliaments is 'key to long term development' and that DfID needs to make Parliaments more central to its programmes. The Forum is therefore investigating if the project could fit into other DfID programmes on democracy strengthening, rather than strictly security/conflict prevention point of view, or, in light of the inquiry, there will be specific programmes aimed at strengthening parliaments.

IPU recently welcomed the inclusion of parliaments' essential role in translating into action a new sustainable development agenda. The agreement highlights the critical part parliaments will play in ensuring the success of the newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs through the passing of laws, the adoption of budgets and the holding of governments to account in implementing the commitments they have made and in ensuring efficient use of limited resources. Let us come back to the SDGs in relation to our work at the later forward-looking session during the Board Meeting.

We are also trying to tap into donors focusing on health to fund work related to armed violence and public health mentioned earlier.

**Comments on financial situation:** As mentioned earlier, the Forum has managed to broaden the financial base during recent years, which is positive as it enables us to continue and reinforce the important armed violence prevention work. However, the current immediate financial situation of the Forum is serious, due to an accumulated deficit from year 2014. Following this item at the agenda, I would like to present an overview of the actual situation and the reasons behind it. The Secretariat has started to plan for solutions to manage the situation and your orientation will be crucial on this theme. Hence, I would like to discuss the matter in a more forward-looking sense, based on a suggested Action Plan that has been elaborated in order to handle the situation in a responsible way. I look forward to address this topic with you, as well as to, later during the Board Meeting, explore the future strategic direction of the Forum.