



PARLIAMENTARY FORUM
ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

Report from Secretary General Karin Olofsson to the General Assembly of the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Lights Weapons, meeting in Montevideo, Uruguay, November 22-23, 2016

Honourable Members of the Parliamentary Forum

Dear Friends,

The state of the world underlines the need to prioritise the prevention and reduction of armed violence. The world in 2016 is marked by an upsurge of violence and armed conflict, as reflected by for example the Syrian civil war, the conflicts in Yemen and East Ukraine, as well as the spread of global terrorism and organized crime. The number of forcibly displaced people has reached 65.3 million, the highest number since the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees records began. Armed conflicts and violence, independent of the scale, are perpetuated by the availability of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), increasing the need for concise and effective steps to tackle its proliferation.

The Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons (PFSALW) is the only international platform for Members of the Parliament, across party-political lines, specifically related to the issues of reduction and prevention of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)-related violence.

This network of dedicated Parliamentarians is exceptional. Each one of you have solid experience from your constituencies and parliaments on what violence means, but also how to bring about political change, sustainable development and creating more peaceful societies.

By sharing this with others and learning from colleagues and the institutional wisdom of the network itself, we can all stretch and improve individual political agendas. But even more important, by forming the common voice of Parliamentarians world-wide, this network is able to make an over-all, common political difference.

Let me again express our deepest thanks to the Parliament of Uruguay for the generous offer to us to host this assembly, in connection with the regional seminar and Board meeting. It has been two years since our last assembly at the Jordanian Parliament in Amman.

I am delighted to report that it has been two active years. The Forum has grown geographically, in numbers and attracted new and dedicated members as well as in its content. I am also pleased to welcome some of you to your first Assembly.

As of 2016 the Forum also has a new Strategic Plan, decided by the Board in August 2016, which centres on the priorities; the role of parliamentarians in implementation of Agenda 2030, in specific SDG16, target 16.4, to significantly reduce illicit flow of arms; strengthen the policy-shaping role for parliamentary action and strengthen the gender equality perspective of the Forum. This Plan will guide our work for coming years, keeping the Forum focused and relevant

in order to achieve our overall objective of more peaceful and developed societies by parliamentary action against armed violence to increase human security.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our members for your hard work over the past two years. In addition to the cooperation with the parliaments and partners I mentioned earlier we would like to extend our sincere thanks to our partners from civil society, research and academics.

Results

Thematic focus - Building an international consensus

The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and the UN Programme of Action on SALW (UNPoA) were two of our main areas of work during 2015 and 2016. 87 countries have now ratified the ATT and many Forum members are working hard to push their respective countries to ratify.

Throughout the year, a series of workshops were held, both at regional and national level, reaching over 200 members from 48 countries in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean as well as international organisations, civil society organisations and government officials.

In numbers, during 2015, the Forum was able to implement 12 national activities (Benin, Brazil, India, Kenya, Liberia, Peru, Serbia, Somaliland, Swaziland and Sweden) participated in 10 international gatherings, for example in the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) the European-Latin-American Assembly (EUROLAT), the Arms Trade Treaty preparatory meetings, the Latin American Parliament (Parlatino), the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC). The Forum also organised 4 regional meetings (Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Middle East) and distributed around 500 copies of different information materials (Handbooks, Newsletters, Research Notes) in English, Spanish and French, involving around 250 parliamentarians in national, regional and international activities. All these included a diverse thematic coverage involving SALW, international instruments such as the Arms Trade Treaty, the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (UNPoA) and the Convention on Cluster Munitions. Other Forum initiatives such as the Model Law on Firearms and Ammunition were also thematic priorities.

In terms of international instruments, the Forum implemented capacity building and policy shaping activities in Benin, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Malawi, Nicaragua, Peru, South Africa, Swaziland, Uganda, Venezuela and Zimbabwe, related to the signature, ratification and implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty and the UNPoA.

Taking home valuable knowledge and tools for parliamentary action, Members of the Forum subsequently worked hard in their respective national context towards signing and ratification of the ATT and implementation of the UNPoA. Gathering from reports received, I am pleased to tell you that Forum Members from several countries have taken concrete action related to the ATT and UNPoA related processes. Forum members, part of the project, were active and significantly contributed to the ratification of the ATT in Burkina Faso, Peru, Seychelles, South Africa and Togo, and also achieved Zimbabwe signing the Treaty. Other noteworthy cases are Central African Republic and Uruguay where parliamentarians' contributed considerably to the ratification process of the ATT.

Forum members also started and received support for different initiatives to draft, reform and introduce bills on small arms and light weapons control, including members in Argentina, Central Africa Republic, Comoros, Costa Rica, Liberia and Uruguay.

I would also like to highlight that progress was made with sceptic countries as Nicaragua, Venezuela and Zimbabwe where the latter signed. Related to the ATT, we also noted some areas where there is room for improvement such as the need to involve more Caribbean states which suffer from high levels of gun violence, as well as countries of the Portuguese speaking community which are often left out of international processes. There is also much work to be done to motivate countries in the Middle East and Northern Africa, MENA, region where we find few State Parties.

Our key activities were generously hosted by the national parliaments of Jamaica, Peru and Portugal and for thematic and regional expertise; we were pleased to work together with partners such as the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs and its regional centres as well as long term partners Small Arms Survey and Control Arms.

Our indicators tell us that the international community, including donors, are still prioritising ATT over UNPoA. I find it relevant to highlight the complementarity of the two instruments; hence, the Forum will continue to work related to both instruments.

Aside from our internal work we were on a number of occasions invited to participate in other ATT and UNPoA related fora, as well as in the media, representing the vital parliamentary aspect. We are currently in the process of planning a new vital step to continue to advance the ATT and UNPOA in the preparatory run-up to the Overview Conference related to the UNPoA in 2018: 'Connecting the dots: Supporting SDG 16, ATT and PoA implementation through increased parliamentary engagement and action in international processes'.

Another important global achievement for this period is the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in particular Sustainable Development Goal 16 on Peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG16) which provides for the first time a sound platform to work address the issue of armed violence and Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) proliferation.

The Forum continues to be active in the international arena. In disarmament fora, we ensure that parliamentarians are present and active and take national ownership of the various processes such as the ATT, UNPoA, Agenda 2030, and others.

At the Forum, the advancement of Agenda 2030 has thus become a key priority for the coming years. A Policy statement was adopted in August 2016. Three seminars on the topic have been held at the Swedish Parliament and the political event "Almedalen". It has also been highlighted internationally. For example, the Forum participated in the Sixth Biennial Meeting of States of the UNPoA in New York, from June 6 to 10, 2016 holding a seminar together with the Swedish Delegation to the United Nations and partner International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) on how parliamentarians and health professionals can work towards the UNPoA and the implementation of SDG 16.4. A Policy Brief was developed with concrete suggestions to support the UNPoA and the SDG.

Another international instrument which received attention is the Convention on Cluster Munitions. With support from the Forum and in cooperation with the Cluster Munition Coalition, Members, especially from African countries have taken action at national level to advance ratification of the Convention. A third Policy Statement related to the issue of cluster munitions

was also adopted in 2015 and aims to revisit the issue of the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) five years after its entry into force to highlight the achievement made and address the challenges that remain.

With regards to the international parliamentary organisations we advance the SALW-issue as integrated part of the broader peace and security agenda by collaborating with important institutions, where we are well respected. At the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Assembly we are given the support to hold side events on current SALW-related topics and at regional parliaments such as the Latin American Parliament and the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (Eurolat) we are continuously invited to address relevant committees on the issue of parliamentary control on arms transfers and other SALW-related issues. These are also excellent opportunities to meet new members and expand the geographical reach of the organisation.

Membership and outreach - the Forum is a global organisation, active in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East. We are constantly growing and have a steadily increasing membership, reaching an all-time high at the end of 2015 – with close to 250 members. As I mentioned earlier our global membership base is a vital foundation for all our work.

The members in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean have been active related to the ATT and UNPoA processes. Our members in the MENA region continue to be involved and in May this year we held yet another seminar for this region, generously hosted by the Swedish Institute in Alexandria and attracted new countries Egypt and Morocco and also helped the Forum to establish contact with important actors in the region such as UNDP's Regional Governance and Peacebuilding cluster and the League of Arab States.

Since our last Assembly, we have new dedicated members in the Horn of Africa, especially in Somaliland where support was given to members related to SALW control. Slowly but surely the Forum is also reaching members of parliaments in Asia. Efforts have been made to involve members of the Indian Congress and while this remains a challenge, plans are made and funding secured to reach out to parliaments in South East Asia in 2017-2018.

Our work also continues with European parliamentarians in order to further the dialogue between producing and affected countries. We work in Eastern Europe, in collaboration with UNDP/SEESAC, especially in the Western Balkans. In terms of Western Europe, as we know, Sweden is one of the founding countries of the Forum and the Secretariat still remains in Stockholm. Swedish parliamentarians continue to be active and the last two years have seen a series of activities held on the issue of parliamentary oversight of arms exports related to Agenda 2030, both in the Swedish Parliament as well as in other important political fora. The main conclusions were the need to ensure that international processes such as the ATT and the UNPoA advance for the implementation of the Agenda 2030, given that is the first time that the issue of illicit small arms flows are included as part of the development agenda. The Forum has increased its activity in Sweden in policy debate relevant for the over-all objective of the Forum and also been featured in the Swedish (social) media on several occasions, mostly by writing debate articles.

One global challenge for our work is to increase continuity by strengthening the work with encouraging, creating and maintaining national parliamentary networks or groups of committed Members.

Gender Equality has always been a foundation for the work of the Forum and as I mentioned earlier now forms part of our newly adopted Strategic Plan. The majority of the Forum's members

are men, which is of course a reflection of the situation in the world's Parliaments, especially considering Parliamentary Committee work on Defence and Foreign affairs. The Forum has a good track-record of involving women, which is for example visible in our Presidency and Board as well as our very dedicated and experienced membership base of women parliamentarians. However, we need to enhance work to continue to involve women in our work, and encourage women MPs to prioritise parliamentary work on peace and security. Not only for the sake of gender equality but as it has been established that women's participation is key for sustainable peace.

Communication: Communication is one key area where the Forum has worked hard to improve in the last year in order to better serve our members, highlight your activities as well as reaching a wider audience with our vital over-all objective. A Communication Strategy has been developed for the approval of the Board within short. Work has already taken place, as many of you have hopefully noticed, with a campaign highlighting members globally and we have increased social media work (Facebook and Twitter). We are aiming for additional funding for a communication's staff, however it has shown complex. Our aim is to highlight what we can achieve together by the strength in our membership base globally. Many of our members regularly take part in media activities and we congratulate you on this work. It is vital that we all use our best abilities to speak up about armed violence and you as representatives of the people are especially suited to do so. We kindly invite you to follow us on Twitter and Facebook, interact and keep us informed, so we jointly can make more visible your efforts towards the Forum's goal.

Organizational, financial situation and funding: During this period the organisation faced challenges but also developed significantly. Late year 2015 and beginning of year 2016 the organisation faced a precarious financial situation, identified at the Secretariat in September 2015. Main reasons for the situation were the leadership vacuum due to the process of recruiting a new Secretary General, lack of support from long-term donors as well as change management that resulted in a deficit of 856'000 SEK at the financial closure of 2015. The Forum managed the situation by balancing with its equity capital (please find more details in Annual Accounts Report regarding year 2015). Measures were taken immediately at the Secretariat involving the Board to manage the situation. Since September 2015 financial austerity has been applied: prioritizing only the core operational costs of the Secretariat and key activities already planned.

Currently, it can be stated that the over-all financial situation is stabilized. As confirmed by the external audit realised by KPMG recently the financial management and control has been strengthened by application of policies, routines and measures identified. The external audit reports regarding the financial reports of the Forum during the period (year 2015, January – March 2016) have been approved by external Auditors, I e unqualified.

However, consolidation of the financial management and strict budget compliance of the organisation will remain a key priority onwards. Solid and transparent financial management policies and routines are part of the ongoing, continuous work of any organisation, and is the foundation for the impact that the Forum aims to achieve. Donor diversification will also remain a key priority in order to increase sustainability; decrease vulnerability and further stabilize the financial foundation. The role of the Board is crucial in this process.

On funding, in April 2016, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida agreed to renew support the Forum for the period 2016-2018, under a project support modality. Another small sum was secured through the Folke Bernadotte Academy for activities in Sweden.

In November 2016, the Forum was confirmed two-year support from the UN Trust Facility Supporting Cooperation on Arms Regulation, UNSCAR. Several other initiatives are taken for further diversifying the funding base. Any suggestions or ideas are most welcome.

In sum, as shown by this report, the Forum has realised vital activities during the period contributing to reach substantial results for reduction and prevention of armed violence. Additionally, several steps have been taken for organisational and financial strengthening, enabling a solid foundation for continued vital work.

The Forum has grown and matured since we last met. It will continue to grow and mature. It has a responsibility to show that political processes can make a change for the reality of people, and that the consecution of human security and more peaceful and developed societies is possible if all stakeholders work closer together. You as Parliamentarians have a crucial role to play in this process.

On behalf of the Secretariat I express my sincere gratitude to you for your dedication and your attention.