



PARLIAMENTARY FORUM
ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

Webinar report

Realising the 2030 Agenda in a changing world affected by COVID-19: Parliamentary action on armed violence prevention to build back better for more peaceful and sustainably developed societies

Thursday 29th October 2020

14:00-15:30 Central European Time (GMT+1)



Executive summary:

The webinar, organised by the Parliamentary Forum on Small and Light Weapons (PFSALW), focused on the role of parliamentarians for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.4 to “by 2030, significantly reduce illicit arms flows (...)” through their legislative, oversight and awareness raising functions. The panel discussions highlighted the global situation related to Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) - related violence and how parliamentarians can work together with other relevant stakeholders in this task. Moreover, the webinar explored the main challenges and opportunities for these efforts in light of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on societies worldwide, as well as the ways forward to build back better for more peaceful and sustainably developed societies.

Introduction:

The seminar was opened by **Hon. Daisy Tourné, President of the Parliamentary Forum on SALW, former Member of Parliament and former Minister of Interior in Uruguay** who commenced by shedding light on the devastating effects of SALW- related violence, causing the death of 223 300 people worldwide every year according to Small Arms Survey. The uncontrolled proliferation of SALW has widespread human, economic and social costs and is a threat to human security and sustainable development. With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and its SDG 16.4 on significantly reducing illicit arms flows, all United Nations (UN) member states have committed to work towards more peaceful and sustainably developed societies globally. She further underlined that as the global COVID-19 pandemic separates people around the world physically, it is more important than ever to find innovative ways to work together and strengthen joint efforts for sustainable peace.

Moderator **Ms Karin Olofsson, Secretary General of the Parliamentary Forum on SALW** took the opportunity to emphasise that with just 10 years left to fulfil the SDGs, the Decade of Action calls for accelerating efforts on behalf of parliamentarian in collaboration with government actors,



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international organisations and civil society to prevent illicit flows of SALW. She further noted that the pandemic presents an additional challenge in light of its severe socioeconomic consequences globally posing a threat to sustainable development and human security. As was declared recently by the UN Secretary General in his Global Appeal for Ceasefire, the need to silence the guns in the midst of the pandemic is palpable. She concluded by underlining that parliamentarians play a vital role through their legislative, oversight and awareness raising functions for the realisation of the 2030 Agenda, including by translating international frameworks for increased arms control to the national implementation level.

Panel I: Realising the 2030 Agenda and preventing armed violence in a changing world

** Ms Simonetta Grassi, Head of the Global Firearms Programme, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)*

** Mr Joseph Dube (South Africa) International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA)*

** Hon. Elias Hankach, Member of Parliament in Lebanon and Member of the Parliamentary Forum on SALW*

The first panel discussion focused on the current global and regional situation on SALW- related violence, and how COVID-19 has contributed the situation. Moreover, discussions highlighted the main challenges and opportunities in achieving SDG 16.4 of the 2030 Agenda.

Mr Joseph Dube (South Africa) International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) underscored that the uncontrolled proliferation and misuse of SALW pose a systematic and pervasive threat to the social and economic development of many countries in Africa, with disproportionate impact on conflict affected countries. Hence, it is key that parliamentarians take appropriate steps to implement international and regional instruments for the prevention of armed violence such as the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), the UN's Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (UN PoA) and the Firearms Protocol. For parliamentarians in Africa, the Central and East Africa agreements on SALW control and the African Union's (AU) Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by 2020, the Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS) Convention and Southern African Development Community' (SADC) Protocol are of particular importance. In the implementation of all these instruments it is vital to include gender responsive measures as well as supporting women's active participation.

Ms Simonetta Grassi, Head of the Global Firearms Programme of UNODC began by stressing that the issue of uncontrolled SALW proliferation is multifaceted. Firearms' trafficking takes place across regions, which requires comprehensive responses on behalf of states that take into account the interaction between the legal and illegal market for SALW. She further noted that some worrying tendencies can be observed in the wake of COVID-19, e.g. the increasing demand for firearms among civilians in the face of perceived insecurity as well as the decreased capacity of states to uphold and efficiently exercise the arms control regime as resources are reallocated to health, social and economic responses. In light of the challenges related to the achievement of SDG 16.4, including insufficient firearms tracing and emerging modalities for illicit manufacture and trafficking of SALW, parliamentarians must be provided with evidence based research to support their actions to prevent armed violence and address its root causes.



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Hon. Elias Hankach, Member of Parliament in Lebanon and Member of the Parliamentary Forum on SALW gave an overview of the Lebanese context where firearms can be found in a very high number of households in Lebanon and where civilians have lost their lives in related accidents, e.g. in connection to the tradition of celebratory gunfire. This calls for enhanced efforts to address public attitudes towards gun possession. In light of lives lost and the long term negative effects on communities, it is important that all actors intensify their efforts to achieve SDG 16.4. He remarked that as a start, it is vital to acknowledge that the majority of illicit SALW once has been legally produced which exposes the need for increased control of SALW to prevent diversion. Moreover, parliamentarians should work together with civil society, wherein the Parliamentary Forum on SALW presents one such opportunity. Through the civil society organisation (CSO) Make Your Mark, Hon. Hankach accounted for the work to strengthen the role of Lebanese youth in shaping policies and influencing parliamentarians.

Panel II: Build back better- Pathways towards more peaceful and sustainably developed societies

** Mr Daniel de Torres, Director, Small Arms Survey*

** H.E. Ms Ann-Sofie Nilsson, Ambassador for Disarmament and Non-proliferation, Sweden*

** Hon. Lilian Timveos, Member of Parliament in Zimbabwe and Member of the Parliamentary Forum on SALW*

The second panel discussion focused on how parliamentarians can contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, specifically SDG 16.4, in a changing world affected by the global pandemic COVID-19. Moreover, the main opportunities and challenges in strengthening partnerships between parliamentarians and other stakeholders in armed violence prevention were highlighted.

Mr Daniel de Torres, Director, Small Arms Survey commenced by sharing his reflection on the importance of being attentive to terminology as it has a concrete bearing on practical approaches, highlighting that SDG 16.4 cannot be implemented but achieved. Moreover, he noted that while the existing international and regional frameworks for SALW control are comprehensive and allow states to significantly reduce armed violence, the main challenge relates to their implementation. As an example, he suggested that poor record collection on SALW due to states failing to provide qualitative reports contributes to the difficulty of analysing gaps and progress with regards to national and regional implementation. Finally, Mr de Torres stated that parliamentarians are vital in ensuring that states ratify relevant instruments and in exercising their oversight role vis-à-vis the governments to ensure they deliver on promises made.

H.E. Ms Ann-Sofie Nilsson, Ambassador for Disarmament and Non-proliferation expressed that multilateralism and international cooperation has become even more pertinent during the COVID-19 pandemic. In her intervention, she stressed the need to apply a holistic approach to global security and gave as a positive example the UN's Secretary General's Disarmament Agenda from 2018 which provides actors with an inclusive road map integrating disarmament and sustainable development. Given the severe human, social and economic cost of SALW posing a threat to good governance and democracy, she further emphasised that SALW must be included into the broader development agenda. In this regard, parliamentarians play a central role for national implementation through their



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legislative, oversight and awareness raising roles where the inclusion of a Women, Peace and Security (WPS) perspective is also imperative.

Hon. Lilian Timveos, Member of Parliament in Zimbabwe and Member of the Parliamentary Forum on SALW accounted for her efforts together with her parliamentary colleagues to advocate for Zimbabwe's ratification of the ATT, e.g. through meetings with relevant ministers. She explained that the country has signed the Treaty but that lacking political will and commitment on behalf of the governments constitutes a central obstacle to advance this process where little progress has been observed in the last period. She further stated that the lack of CSOs in the country actively working on this topic is an additional factor contributing to the challenge, as increased pressure from the public and civil society could have a decisive impact in a positive direction on the political leadership.

In the **Question & Answer- session**, it was observed that a key challenge in the work of parliamentarians to promote enhanced SALW-control in respective countries is the lack of political will and in some cases open resistance on behalf of parliamentary colleagues and governments. The discussions also focused on what additional research is needed to support parliamentary action on armed violence prevention and reduction. Accessing updated and accurate statistics along with improved understanding for the context where SALW appear, e.g. in human trafficking, environmental crimes or gender based violence, was brought up as important to ensure that responses adequately address the reality. Moreover, the role of corruption in diversion of legal SALW to the illicit market was pointed out as an area for continued research. Finally, discussions highlighted the challenge of increasing attention to SALW on the international disarmament agenda and on the broader political agenda, where SALW remains marginalised topic.

Concluding remarks:

The webinar was closed by **Hon. Daisy Tourné** who expressed her sincere gratitude for the dedication of all panellists and participants joining the event. She underlined the importance of continued joint commitment and action for more peaceful and sustainable societies in a time when democracy is under pressure globally, SALW-related violence is on the rise and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic constitutes an obstacle to sustainable peace.