



PARLIAMENTARY FORUM
ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

Project

“Connecting the Dots: Enhancing implementation of the UN PoA and the Women, Peace & Security and 2030 Agendas – through increased parliamentary engagement and action in international processes”

24 June 2021

11:00-14:00 GMT+2

Webinar: Preparatory step to the UN PoA BMS 7, end of July 2021

Concept Note

Executive Summary

The state of the world, marked by violence and conflict, underlines the need to prioritise the prevention and reduction of armed violence. According to the Small Arms Survey, more than 1 billion Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) are circulating worldwide, 85% in the hands of civilians¹, causing the death of approximately 223 300 people every year.² The number of forcibly displaced people due to conflict, violence and persecution has reached over 79 million, the highest number since the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees records began.³ The situations behind forced displacement are highly linked to the misuse of SALW. Armed conflicts and violence, independent of their scale, are perpetuated by the uncontrolled availability of SALW, increasing the need for concise and effective steps to tackle its proliferation. The uncontrolled proliferation of SALW has widespread human, economic and social costs. Furthermore, it threatens democracy and good governance and facilitates violations of human rights and International Humanitarian Law (IHL), where civilians are the main victims of violations of IHL in armed conflicts.⁴

The Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons

The Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons (PFSALW) is the only membership-based organisation gathering parliamentarians globally across party-political lines, specifically related to the reduction and prevention of SALW-related violence. It is an organisation constituted by parliamentarians, for parliamentarians working for sustainable development, human security and peace-building. Constituted in the Spanish Congress in 2002, PFSALW today gathers approximately 295 members in over 100 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East. The Theory of Change of PFSALW is to contribute to the achievement of more peaceful and sustainably developed societies by enhancing parliamentary action in the implementation and universalisation of international frameworks relevant to the prevention and reduction of SALW-related violence through three mutually reinforcing methodological pillars: capacity-building, policy-shaping and awareness-raising. The points of departure for these pillars are hence the three key roles of a parliamentarian; the legislative, oversight and awareness-raising functions.

¹ Small Arms Survey, Estimating Global Civilian-held firearms numbers. Last accessed 2021-02-12

<http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/weapons-and-markets/tools/global-firearms-holdings.html>

² Small Arms Survey (2020), Global Violent Deaths in 2018. Last accessed 2021-02-12

<http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/W-Infographics/SAS-GVD-March-2020-update.pdf>

³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Figures at a glance. Last accessed 2021-02-12

<https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>

⁴ International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Contemporary challenges for IHL. Last accessed 2021-02-12

<https://www.icrc.org/en/document/contemporary-challenges-ihl>



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Since its foundation in 2002, PFSALW has enjoyed fruitful cooperation with parliaments and parliamentarians from Africa, by hosting different seminars and providing its members with capacity-building, policy-building and awareness-raising support and tools for armed violence reduction and prevention. This initiative provides a relevant opportunity for PFSALW to further strengthen and consolidate its relationship with its membership in Africa as well as relevant stakeholders such as the Pan-African Parliament. It is also an opportunity for parliamentarians in the region to take part in an initiative that will develop their capacities on the issue of prevention and reduction of SALW-related violence, and decisively support their political efforts on this area.

Objective

Following the first Pan-African Parliament-PFSALW seminar titled “*Connecting the Dots: Supporting the 2030 Agenda, the Arms Trade Treaty and the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms implementation through increased parliamentary engagement and action in international processes*” in May 2018, as well as the subsequent regional seminar in the Pan-African Parliament in October 2019⁵, this webinar aims to promote the implementation of the United Nations 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 2030 Agenda in relation to the United Nations Security Council resolutions (UNSCRs) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). Parliamentarians, especially women parliamentarians, are targeted as vital actors given their legislative, oversight and awareness raising roles. The objective is to enhance implementation of the instruments by parliamentary action through capacity-building, policy-shaping and awareness-raising. It seeks to enhance women as active agents and increase their participation in decision-making on relevant SALW processes, mainstreaming WPS and gender in arms regulation policies, programmes and legislation.

The webinar is a first step in a chain of seminars and webinars, part of a project financed by the United Nations Office on Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), specifically the Trust Facility Supporting Cooperation on Arms Regulation (UNSCAR). The project aims to engage parliamentarians as part of the run-up and preparation for the UN PoA Seventh Biennial Meeting of States (BMS 7) in July 2021.

The webinar has an African focus and will gather key parliamentarians from the region, with focus on the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Niger, Mali and Tanzania. It will serve as a starting point and preparation to identify parliamentary recommendations on actions and perspectives to the BMS 7 and to prepare for the realisation of a physical seminar in the region which is planned to be held in 2021.

At the physical seminars, the first one to be realised for Southeast Asia, and the other to be realised in Africa, parliamentary priorities and recommendations will be identified, based on PFSALW’s previously elaborated Parliamentary Action Plans (PAPs), with updates on contextual aspects and in relation to WPS. The current Parliamentary Action Plans available for Southeast Asia and Africa will be updated and provide input to, and underpin, the impact of the results of the BMS 7 and related processes.

The low level of parliamentary involvement in the above-mentioned processes underlines the relevance of the efforts to improve parliamentary engagement, understanding and ownership of the international conventional arms control framework. Political will is crucial for the implementation of WPS, and to identify synergies with global arms regulation instruments.

⁵ The regional seminar co-hosted with the Pan-African Parliament on October 2019 was titled “Enhancing parliamentary engagement and action for more peaceful and sustainably developed societies - implementation of 2030 Agenda, the Arms Trade Treaty and the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (UN PoA)”



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Background – armed violence in Africa

In 2018, 596,000 persons died of lethal violence, including 93,700 women and girls, and millions more were affected by armed violence.⁶ Globally, firearms were used in about 38% of all violent deaths in 2018, which resulted in 223,300 deaths. Alone in Africa in 2017, firearms were used in over 40% of the homicides.⁷

Uncontrolled SALW, their illicit acquisition and transfer is a recurring security dilemma in Africa. The concentration of most of Africa's estimated 100 million uncontrolled SALW can be found in crisis zones and other security-challenged environments, exacerbating and prolonging conflicts.⁸ Apart from causing injury and loss of life, armed violence has severe effects on sustainable development, good governance and contributes to the persistence of armed conflict. Further, it facilitates violations of human rights and impedes economic investment, having a negative impact on public health systems and productivity levels by draining public resources away from education and socio-economic development.⁹ The risk of gender-based violence (GBV) heightens in conflict situations and it is estimated that about 45.6 percent of African women have experienced GBV as a result of armed conflict, compared to 35 percent globally.¹⁰

Many conflicts in Africa involve non-state actors who use uncontrolled SALW. Since non-state actors, such as militias, warlords and extremist groups, have no legal authority to purchase or bear arms, they resort to illicit means of arms acquisition – mainly through diversion from state stockpiles, black markets and trafficking, as well as locally produced arms. In the first-ever continental analysis of illicit arms flows in Africa, the African Union (AU) Commission and the Small Arms Survey have identified the scale, availability, characteristics, and supply patterns of illicit small arms in Africa. Among the key findings it is noted that while illicit weapons remain dominated by old weapons, seizures of newer models point to new and emerging sources of SALW to equip criminal actors active on the continent. External sources of illicit SALW include embargo-breaking transfers primarily from the Middle East and Eastern Europe. This highlights the need to ensure the effective implementation of instruments such as the UN PoA – a task where parliamentary oversight is vital.¹¹

For countries already affected by conflict, the COVID-19 pandemic constitutes an additional challenge with the potential to exacerbate tensions. The spread of the virus risks to have devastating economic and political consequences in fragile contexts where the capacity to adequately address the crisis is limited.¹² COVID-19 has impacted on peace operations in the region, reducing their activity and thereby contributing to increased vulnerability in affected countries. Moreover, it is expected that economic recession will drastically contract the size and scope of peacekeeping operations in the upcoming period.¹³

Suggested profile of the participants

- Member of a committee relevant to the implementation of the UN PoA, the 2030 and WPS agendas.
- Willingness/readiness to have an active role in relation to the topics of the seminar, e.g. contacting the government, speaking in the parliament, raising awareness, tabling questions to ministries.

⁶ Small Arms Survey, Global Violent Deaths in 2018. Last accessed 2021-03-02

<http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/W-Infographics/SAS-GVD-March-2020-update.pdf>

⁷ UNODC, Global Study on Homicide 2019 (Vienna, 2019). Last accessed 2021-03-02

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/global-study-on-homicide.html>

⁸ Oxfam. 2017. The Human Cost of Uncontrolled Arms in Africa. Last accessed 2021-03-02

https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/rr-human-cost-uncontrolled-arms-africa-080317-en.pdf

⁹ Oxfam. 2017. The Human Cost of Uncontrolled Arms in Africa. Last accessed 2021-03-02

https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/rr-human-cost-uncontrolled-arms-africa-080317-en.pdf

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Small Arms Survey. 2019. Weapons Compass - Mapping Illicit Small Arms Flows in Africa. Last accessed 2021-03-02

<http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/U-Reports/SAS-AU-Weapons-Compass.pdf>

¹² United Nations. 2020. Global Humanitarian Response Plan Covid-19. Last accessed 2021-02-12

<https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/Global-Humanitarian-Response-Plan-COVID-19.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1tyG1yzaHsUdncEUCN81b0hO3ZDuN85wp7kxS6pcWH9uN7rRMUfW0yuUQ>

¹³ African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes. 2020. The impact of COVID-19 on peace operations in Africa. Last accessed 2021-02-12

<https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-peace-operations-in-africa/>



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- Readiness/willingness to liaise with PFSALW to further discuss actions, follow up and evaluation steps, support and achievements related to the common objectives of armed violence prevention and reduction.
- The gender equality perspective will be considered to the extent possible, putting focus on the expertise related to the advancement of the WPS agenda.

Implementation, results and impact

The webinar aims at promoting relevant actions with parliamentarians exchanging on policy tools and knowledge (a Parliamentary Action Plan and thematic sessions) that can allow them to engage at the national, regional and international level to advance the UN PoA, the 2030 Agenda and the WPS agenda¹⁴. It will also support the process of including a parliamentary component and recommendations to be presented at the BSM 7. In addition, the results of the webinar and the conclusions from the BSM 7 will set the stage for a physical two-day seminar, in which the previously approved Parliamentary Action Plan will be followed up and updated.

This can support parliamentarians in following up with their governments, facilitate their participation as part of their government delegations in international meetings related to these instruments, and serve as a platform for parliamentary action at the national, regional and international policy level. Finally, the webinar also provides an excellent opportunity for all stakeholders, parliamentarians, civil society organisations, government representatives and diplomats to exchange views, discuss and carry on with a constructive dialogue concerning the implementation of the UN PoA, of the 2030 Agenda and WPS agenda, during times where physical interaction are limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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¹⁴ Consider the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition ([Firearms Protocol](#)), supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, given its legally binding nature.