



PARLIAMENTARY FORUM
ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

Newsletter December 2023

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Honourable Members and Friends of the Forum,

On behalf of the Secretariat of the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons (the Forum), I sincerely hope this message finds you well. The state of the world, marked by violence and conflict, underlines the need to prioritise the prevention and reduction of armed violence. For example, according to the [Global Peace Index 2023](#), the peacefulness of the world has been on a steady decline for the past 15 years. In addition, societies face challenges such as the largest number of conflicts witnessed since 1946, and climate change, [as reported by the United Nations \(UN\)](#). The socioeconomic effects of these intersecting crises are in turn impairing the capacity of states to uphold the arms control regime. **In this regard, it is more urgent than ever that we remain committed to preventing and reducing Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)-related violence through parliamentary action. I would like to take the opportunity to convey my gratitude to all of you pursuing determined work in this direction in your respective contexts, despite the existing challenges.**

According to a recent research update from the Small Arms Survey (SAS) [260,000 people were killed by firearms in 2021](#), a significant increase of firearms related deaths compared to the death of 211,000 people in 2020. Moreover, ongoing conflicts as well as a recent increase in homicide rates in some countries, constitute significant risks for further worsening the trend. **Continued and strengthened efforts for the achievement of more peaceful and sustainably developed societies are needed and parliamentarians play a key role** in contributing to the work on prevention and reduction of armed violence through their legislative, oversight and awareness raising functions.

As the Forum's Members and Friends, you all play an essential role in our joint efforts to prevent armed conflict and violence by raising awareness and taking action to contribute to a more peaceful and sustainable world. **I am therefore grateful for your maintained dedication and support.** I would also like to express my gratitude for the much-appreciated financial support of the current donors to the Forum: the [United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs'](#) (UNODA) Trust Facility Supporting Cooperation on Arms Regulation (UNSCAR), the [Ministry of Foreign Affairs \(MFA\) of Canada](#) and the [Ministry of Foreign Affairs \(MFA\) of Sweden](#).

The Forum has been able to continue its determined work towards more peaceful and sustainably developed societies thanks to the aforementioned support. During the year 2023, the Forum has completed several qualitative activities in-person with elements of virtual participation methods. The Forum is particularly pleased to have been able to complete several activities that were previously postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as detailed below.

With this letter, I would also like to give a **brief update on coming activities**, related to our determined work to increase human security and sustainable development by preventing illicit flows of SALW. The Forum and relevant international organisations are constantly cooperating and communicating in order to prepare for future events in a safe and responsible manner. Please see the section about our ongoing and upcoming activities below.

I would, furthermore, like to highlight that in the current challenging times, many organisations are facing difficulties ensuring financial sustainability brought about by a more complex world. **Therefore, the Forum appreciates the support of its Members and Friends in ensuring the long-term sustainability of the organisation.** For your kind consideration, I would like to take this opportunity to warmly welcome you to support our efforts by making a donation to the Forum's cause. **Small or big, all contributions make a difference and are highly appreciated!** To donate, please visit our [website](#), where swift and secure channels enable donations via both Donorbox and Swish (for Swedish residents). Thank you very much in advance, **together we can contribute to a more peaceful world!**

Finally, the Forum would like to convey warm Season's greetings **and a peaceful 2024!** To stay tuned on further updates regarding coming activities, please follow the Forum on our social media channels [Facebook](#) and [X](#) (former Twitter), **and please do not hesitate to contact us and share news on the important work you are doing!**

Stay safe and healthy!

Best wishes,



Karin Olofsson, Secretary General
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Previous key activities

[Key results from the Forum's work in 2022](#)

In the initial part of year 2023, substantial results from the previous year's work of the Forum were compiled, please note a summary of key results as follows:

- During 2022, **ten key activities** of the Forum were realised, **including eight capacity building, policy shaping, awareness raising activities** (four regional seminars, one global webinar, one international side event, one national seminar, one social media campaign) **and two institutional activities** in the form of regular Board meetings. The activities involved over **320** persons in total, including approximately **95 parliamentarians** and additionally **225 other stakeholders** from civil society, government and international organisations;
- Persistent activity of Members for more peaceful and sustainably developed societies clearly underpinned by the Forum's support on capacity development, policy shaping and awareness raising efforts and access to policy tools, resulted in **over 95 individual parliamentary actions, including 26 legislative and oversight actions and 70 awareness raising initiatives**, which was a noteworthy increase compared to a total of **80 legislative, oversight and awareness raising actions in 2021**.
- **Continued solid membership base** both in numbers and geographically. At the end of 2022, the Forum's membership consisted of over 300 parliamentarians, in specific 324 Members, from approximately 100 countries. Out of the Forum's Members, 70% are men, and 30% are women;
- **Further strengthened gender equality perspective**; promoting meaningful participation of women in a male dominated field. **51% of all participants in the key activities were women**, indicating that the Forum's efforts to include women's participation at an equal level in peace and security processes and all activities continue to render substantial results. **Out of the total number of the parliamentarians participating 46% were women**. This figure is considerably above the world average of 26.7% women parliamentarians in the world's parliaments according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), and an important achievement, in specific in comparison with 2021 when 33% of the participating parliamentarians were women.
- The number of times that the Forum and its Members were **featured in media reached nearly 50 appearances**, including the publication of **one opinion piece**. **In addition, one social media campaign** was carried out during December, reaching over **1 200 viewers on Facebook and Twitter**;
- In 2022, the Forum also celebrated its 20th Anniversary. [An Anniversary Publication](#) was published in December 2022, highlighting the vital efforts of parliamentarians across the world in preventing SALW-related violence and looking back at the main lessons learned from 20 years of contributing to peace and sustainable development. The Publication also set out to explore the key current challenges and opportunities, as to encourage parliamentarians to continue their vital work for the rights and safety of every person around the globe.

Board meeting, April 2023

On April 19, 2023, the Board of the Forum met for a virtual Board meeting. Among other aspects, the Board **provided strategic guidance and advice on the planning and implementation of activities and results**. The Forum's important [Anti-Corruption Policy](#) was also adopted in an updated version at the meeting. Welcome to read it via the above link.

Regional high-level meeting in the Western Balkans, June 2023

The regional high-level meeting in the Western Balkans was held in cooperation with the [South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons](#) (SEESAC), [Regional Cooperation Council](#) (RCC) and the Parliament of Albania on 21-22 June of this year in Tirana, Albania, after having been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The high level meeting was entitled “*Enhancing parliamentary awareness and action for more peaceful and sustainably developed societies - implementation of the Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and their ammunition in the Western Balkans (Roadmap) by 2024*”. It aimed to **strengthen parliamentary action in relation to the “[Regional Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of SALW and their ammunition in the Western Balkans by 2024](#)”**, and other relevant instruments such as 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 [Women, Peace and Security](#) (WPS) agenda, specifically for parliamentarians from the six jurisdictions (Albania, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia) participating in the implementation of the Roadmap in the region. **The high-level meeting constituted a highly innovative initiative** by gathering parliamentarians from the region for the first time within a Forum “Connecting the Dots”-project and in relation to the process on the regional Roadmap. At the meeting, vital policy-relevant discussions took place where parliamentarians reviewed challenges, opportunities and the current status of implementation of the Roadmap in dialogue with representatives from SALW Commissions in the region, along with experts from regional and international organisations and civil society. The meeting formed part of the Forum's project support 2021-2023 from UNSCAR.

Regional seminar in Latin America and the Caribbean, June-July 2023

Within the project support from the MFA of Canada, a regional seminar in Latin America and the Caribbean took place on 30 June – 1 July 2023 in Panamá in cooperation with, and at the venue of, the Latin American and Caribbean Parliament (PARLATINO), titled “*Reduciendo las amenazas a la seguridad internacional: Movilizando a*

parlamentarios y parlamentarias de América Latina y el Caribe para fortalecer la acción parlamentaria mundial para una mayor universalización e implementación del Tratado sobre el Comercio de Armas (TCA)". The seminar aimed at **strengthening parliamentary knowledge for increased universalisation and implementation of the [Arms Trade Treaty](#) (ATT), linking to the WPS agenda**. The seminar targeted parliamentarians from the region with a specific focus on promoting gender equality. Hence, equal inclusion of women parliamentarians in the seminar was instrumental as to enhance women's active participation in peace and security processes. The collaboration with PARLATINO enabled participants, parliamentarians as well as other stakeholders, to reach a wider parliamentary audience, providing thematic policy knowledge and a solid institutional platform for universalisation and implementation efforts in the region. At the seminar, **parliamentary recommendations on actions to take on the ATT and the WPS agenda were compiled to a regional [Parliamentary Action Plan](#) (PAP)** (in Spanish), adopted by the attending parliamentarians, serving as a vital roadmap in the region for future parliamentary actions on the topic. Welcome to read the report from the seminar [here](#) (in Spanish).

International side event at the Ninth Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty (CSP 9), August 2023

Within the previously mentioned project support from the MFA Canada, the Forum realised an international side event at the Ninth Conference of States Parties to the ATT (CSP9) on 24 August 2023 in Geneva, Switzerland, co-organised with the MFA Sweden: "*Reducing threats to international security: Mobilising parliamentarians from Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and Middle East to strengthen global parliamentary action for enhanced universalisation and implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty*". The purpose of the side event was to provide input to and underpin the impact of the discussions and results within the framework of CSP9, specifically on the importance of parliamentary action to advance the ATT, linking to the WPS perspective. The conclusions from the regional seminar in Asia held in collaboration with the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) in June 2022 and aforementioned regional seminar in Latin America and the Caribbean, along with the key recommendations from the Forum's membership in the Middle East and North Africa identified in the Forum's regional seminar in 2019, **were presented at the side event. Please find more information from the side event in this [brief summary](#) of regional recommendations and the side [event's report](#).**

Regional seminar in Southeast Asia, October 2023

A regional seminar in Southeast Asia was held in cooperation with AIPA on 4-5 October 2023 in Jakarta, Indonesia, titled “*Connecting the Dots: Advancing the implementation of the Women, Peace & Security (WPS) agenda by enhancing parliamentary capacity and action in Asia*”. The aim of the seminar was to strengthen the role of parliamentarians in peace and security processes, including women parliamentarians who are generally underrepresented in such efforts, through the enhancement of parliamentary capacity, action, and leverage on the WPS agenda and other relevant frameworks such as the UN PoA. **The seminar built on results from previous “Connecting the Dots” activities in the region, including successful regional seminars in Asia in collaboration with AIPA in June 2022.** The seminar formed part of the UNSCAR project support 2020-2022/2023. At the seminar, the regional PAP approved in 2022 was revised and considered by the participating parliamentarians, to be presented and considered by all AIPA Member Parliaments and to be brought up at AIPA’s General Assembly in October 2024 for a possible Resolution on the topic.

International seminar of the Forum, December 2023

The international seminar of the Forum titled “*Reducing threats to international security: Mobilising parliamentarians globally, with focus on Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and Middle East, for enhanced universalisation and implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty*” was realised on the 13-14 December in Geneva, Switzerland, forming part of the MFA Canada project support. **The objective of the seminar was to facilitate inter-regional exchange of good practices from the aforementioned regional seminars in Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as from the Forum’s membership in MENA.** Realised in cooperation with the IPU, the seminar sought to provide parliamentarians globally, including from the aforementioned regions, with policy tools and knowledge that allow them to engage at the national, regional and international levels to promote the universalisation and implementation of the ATT, and identify synergies between the ATT and other relevant frameworks, especially the WPS agenda. The conclusions and recommendations of the seminar will be compiled in a brief parliamentary policy publication to serve as a roadmap for parliamentarians globally in their work on the ATT.

Launch event for the Spanish version of the Parliamentary Handbook “Assuring our Common Future”, December 2023

[Assuring our Common Future: A Parliamentary Handbook in support of disarmament for security and sustainable development](#) was originally released in November 2020 to assist legislators from around the world and across the political spectrum to undertake effective

action on a range of disarmament issues highlighted by the UN Secretary-General's report "Securing our Common Future". The Handbook was prepared in an initiative led by Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (PNND) in cooperation with the IPU, Parliamentarians for Global Action, the Forum, World Future Council, Geneva Centre for Security Policy and supported by the UNODA. The aim of the launch, which formed part of the seminar previously mentioned, was to **introduce an additional language version of the Handbook, in Spanish, to increase accessibility and further the cause of assisting parliamentarians globally in disarmament-related issues.** The aforementioned translation process was enabled by the coordination and funding of the Forum. The event was held in a hybrid modality, enabling both in-situ and online participation, and in total approximately 45 parliamentarians and other stakeholders joined the event.

General Assembly of the Forum, December 2023

Following the decisions taken at Board Meetings during the period 2020 until 2022, the General Assembly (GA) of the Forum was postponed until the COVID-19 pandemic situation permitted for its safe realisation. Hence, **the realisation of the Forum's GA on 15 December 2023, in Geneva, Switzerland was indeed vital.** The GA is the highest organ of the Forum, and it is constituted by the regular Members and presided by the Presidium of the Forum. **The GA provides strategic advice on future priority guidelines to the Board, elects the new Board, discusses and approves the report of the Forum since the last GA and revises the Statutes of the Forum, among other functions.** The GA is an invaluable opportunity to gather Members, exchange ideas and work for the achievement of more peaceful and sustainably developed societies. As one of the main items during the GA in December, a new Board of the Forum was elected, for the period 2023-2025. Moreover, at the GA, the Geneva Declaration was adopted by the Members, welcome to find it [here](#).

New Board elected for mandate period 2023-2025

As mentioned above, a new Board of the Forum was elected at the GA in Geneva, Switzerland. **We would like to warmly welcome our new, and re-elected, Board members!** The new Board consists of eight representatives; seven parliamentarians and one civil society representative. Please find a short presentation of the new Board [here](#).

Statutory Board meeting, December 2023

On December 15, 2023, the above presented newly elected Board of the Forum gathered for the Statutory Board meeting. **The meeting focused on providing strategic guidelines**

for the Forum for the upcoming year, and hence, the Operational Plan and Budget for 2024 were adopted.

Social media campaign “Season’s gift card”, December 2023

During the month of December, **the Forum launched a social media campaign with the aim to encourage people to support the Forum’s continued efforts for peace and sustainable development with donations.** The campaign, which recently ended, focused on raising awareness on the Forum’s work and the importance of parliamentary action to prevent SALW-related violence. As it was realised during the Holiday season, the Forum rewarded donations with a virtual “Season’s gift” card.

Ongoing and upcoming events

Social media campaign “#WordsOverBullets”, 2024

In the beginning of 2024, **the Forum will relaunch its social media campaign #WordsOverBullets** on Facebook, X (former Twitter), and LinkedIn. A fundamental pillar of the Forum’s work is awareness-raising, where the campaigns on social media play a vital role in involving and reaching a great number of people. The objective of the campaign is to contribute to increased awareness on the importance of reducing and preventing SALW-related violence. **The campaign will also aim at highlighting the importance of parliamentary action to, and achievements in, preventing and reducing the illicit flow of SALW.** Parliamentarians as well as other relevant actors will participate in the campaign with photos and key messages in videos. Thank you to all participating in previous campaigns! Warmly welcome to participate in the coming round and spread the vital message - stay tuned to interact with the campaign!

Call for Action – please sign and spread the word!

Since 2019, the Forum has an **ongoing online petition, titled “[Call for Action](#)”, to highlight the vital role of parliamentarians to prevent the uncontrolled flow of SALW.** In times when democracy is under pressure, while conflicts and armed violence is on the rise, global parliamentary action is more vital than ever to contribute to more peaceful and sustainably developed societies.

We welcome all, parliamentarians and any other actors, agreeing on the importance to prevent and reduce armed violence globally, to sign the petition online. **Please spread the word and share the link in your networks.** Many thanks to all who have already signed

the petition. Together we can contribute to human security, peace, and sustainable development worldwide!

Regional seminar in the Middle East and North Africa

Looking ahead towards the upcoming activities in 2024, the regional seminar in the Middle East and North Africa, in cooperation with the [Swedish Embassy in Amman](#), which was planned to be realised in November 2023, was postponed due to the current regrettable security situation in the region. It is tentatively planned to be held in Jordan in the first part of 2024, based on a coming joint assessment between the Forum and the Embassy. The seminar is also taking place within the framework of the aforementioned project support from MFA Canada. **The seminar is targeting parliamentarians from the region with specific considerations towards equal inclusion of women parliamentarians as to enhance women's active role and participation in peace and security processes.** The objective is to strengthen parliamentary action for the universalisation and implementation of the ATT, linking to the WPS agenda, as well as to identify the most prioritised actions to be compiled in a regional PAP.

Regional seminars in East Africa

In collaboration with the Pan-African Parliament, two regional seminars for East Africa are tentatively planned to be held at the headquarters of the Pan-African Parliament in Johannesburg, South Africa in the first part of 2024. The planned seminars are funded by UNSCAR. **The intended outcome is to enhance parliamentary capacity, action, and leverage in the work on conventional arms control instruments, concretely the UN PoA and the WPS agenda as well as synergies to other relevant international conventional arms control frameworks.** The seminars will build on the Forum's aforementioned previous "Connecting the Dots" projects supported by UNSCAR, including the regional seminar in collaboration with the National Assembly of Cameroon on 21-22 June 2022, and the regional seminar in October 2019, organised in cooperation with the Pan-African Parliament. Please stay tuned for more information regarding these seminars and other activities in 2024.