



PARLIAMENTARY FORUM
ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS



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

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Executive Summary

The present policy publication gathers conclusions and recommendations collected and elaborated during the activities within the project *“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”* funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Canada.

During the project, several regional and international seminars have been implemented; in Asia on 9–10 June 2022 together with the ASEAN Inter Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA), in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) together with the Latin American and Caribbean Parliament (PARLATINO) on 30 June – 1 July 2023 and in the Middle East on 12–13 June 2024, together with the Swedish Embassy in Amman. Additionally, an international side event was held at the Ninth Conference of States Parties (CSP9) to the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) on 24 August 2023, co-hosted with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, and an international seminar was conducted on 13–14 December 2023 in collaboration with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in Geneva. Culminating the project, and aforementioned events, PFSALW participated in the historic Tenth Conference of States Parties (CSP10), marking the 10th anniversary of the ATT. At the milestone conference, PFSALW organised a side event on 21 August 2024, in collaboration with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Canada. During the event, parliamentary actions on the reduction and prevention of SALW-related violence based on the present recommendations were highlighted and discussed among parliamentarians, government officials, and civil society representatives.

At the regional seminars, the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons’ (PFSALW) three first-ever Parliamentary Action Plans (PAPs) were adopted with specific focus on the ATT and linking to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. The PAPs summarise the main recommendations for parliamentary action to enhance the universalisation and implementation of the ATT, elaborated and approved by the parliamentarians in the respective regional seminars.

The project has aimed at identifying synergies between several relevant international frameworks, to strengthen parliamentary action on the ATT. Specifically, the project targeted parliamentarians, in particular women parliamentarians, and their pathways of change towards undertaking legislative, oversight and awareness-raising actions on the ATT, while identifying synergy effects with other relevant international instruments, such as the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS).

Lastly, PFSALW would like to express its sincere gratitude to the donor of the project, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Canada, and the Weapons Threat Reduction Program (WTRP) for trusting and supporting the work of PFSALW.

International Frameworks

The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)

The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2013 and in force since December 2014, represents the first global, legally binding agreement to regulate international trade in conventional weapons, including Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). The ATT aims to contribute to international and regional peace, security, and stability by reducing human suffering and promoting cooperation, transparency, and responsible action among the international community. It establishes international standards for arms transfers, restricts the production and trade of certain weapons, and prevents the export of arms to conflict zones. To date, 115 states have become State Parties to the Treaty.¹

The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda

The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, established by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000, underscores the critical role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, peace negotiations, humanitarian responses, and post-conflict reconstruction. The politically binding resolution calls on all parties to take measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, including sexual abuse, during armed conflict. It reaffirms women's participation as essential to achieving sustainable peace and security.

Prevention and reduction of SALW-related violence: the vital role of parliamentarians

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 most recent numbers, more than one billion of SALW are circulating worldwide, with 85% in the hands of civilians², causing the death of approximately 260 000 people every year.³ In light of this, parliamentarians are important actors in armed violence prevention and reduction given their three key functions related to legislation, oversight and awareness-raising. Prevention and reduction of armed violence requires a complex set of interventions, underlining the need for parliamentary exchange on experiences, lessons learned and good practices. Active parliamentary participation in United Nations' and other related international processes is decisive in tackling the uncontrolled proliferation of SALW.

Parliamentarians promote ratification of international treaties and can initiate discussions with fellow colleagues in other countries, vastly contributing to the formation of international norms on SALW and harmonisation regionally. The role includes investing effort in the domestication of national laws and adoption of necessary legislative and policy measures; holding their governments accountable to comply with their international obligations under the ATT; using parliamentary diplomacy as a vehicle for awareness raising, and coordination and information exchange to facilitate universalisation and implementation of the ATT, contributing to international security and the achievement of more peaceful and sustainably developed societies.

¹ Arms Trade Treaty Status Page, available at:

<https://thearmstradetreaty.org/treaty-status.html?templateId=209883>, accessed on 4th of September 2024

² Small Arms Survey (2018), *Estimating Global Civilian-held Firearms numbers*, available at:

<https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-BP-Civilian-Firearms-Numbers.pdf>

³ Small Arms Survey (2023): *Global Violent Deaths in 2021*, available at:

https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/SAS-GVD-2023-update-FINAL_0.pdf

Regional parliamentary recommendations

The purpose of the PAPs is to increase parliamentary knowledge and action for the implementation and universalisation of the ATT with linkage to the WPS agenda. The recommendations for parliamentary actions in the PAPs highlight the importance of including a gender equality perspective consistently in actions regarding SALW control, and are related to the following three key roles of a parliamentarian:

- 1. Legislation** is needed to ensure universalisation, domestication and implementation of the instruments. It includes drafting legislation, as well as the legislative procedures to discuss, evaluate and pass bills that allow the ratification of treaties, such as the ATT.
- 2. Oversight** is required to ensure that legislative decisions made regarding the instruments are implemented; it is necessary for holding governments accountable and to secure cooperation between relevant agencies during the implementation of said instruments.
- 3. Awareness-raising** ensures implementation of key instruments by creating political will and public understanding. It mainly takes place between parliamentarians and the constituents but can also be directed towards parliamentary colleagues as well as the executive level.

Below follows a summary of recommendations from each regional seminar implemented during the project, included in the PAPs:

Parliamentary recommendations, Asia⁴

1. LEGISLATION

- 1.1.** Ensure the political commitments in the ATT and the UN PoA are harmonised with national laws and/or regulations.
- 1.2.** Consider adopted resolutions by the UN General Assembly, the ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint 2025, ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security (RPA WPS) as the foundation for amending and enacting relevant national legislation.
- 1.3.** Establish and/or strengthen regional legislative cross-border cooperation and coordination.

2. OVERSIGHT

- 2.1.** Engage with Government agencies and relevant national institutions to ensure the country is aligned with international reporting commitments, including harmonised reporting on the ATT, UN PoA, CEDAW and the WPS agenda.
- 2.2.** Urge for women participation and inclusion in peace and security processes, as well as ensuring that SALW-control measures adequately address the needs of all, including women.
- 2.3.** Encourage the development of National Action Plans on the WPS agenda including gender responsive SALW control measures.

⁴ The recommendations were identified at the regional seminar for Asia on June 9–10, 2022.

3. AWARENESS-RAISING

- 3.1.** Promote awareness raising and/or campaigns as the main priority of ASEAN in the implementation of WPS agenda and SALW-control measures.
- 3.2.** Enhance inter-parliamentary coordination, information, data sharing and analysis based on topical research, dialogue and exchange of best practices.
- 3.3.** Support the incorporation of women's agenda into the peacebuilding and development processes within the ASEAN identity, by involving weaving elements such as familial bonds, culture, art, shared concerns, and faith that are distinct from its security aspects.

Parliamentary recommendations, Latin America and the Caribbean⁵

1. LEGISLATION

- 1.1.** Establish regular mechanisms for information management, with a mandatory, timely, and systematic nature, to allow for periodic risk assessments and to monitor the patterns of violence. Consider the necessary measures to mitigate the risks of violence and establish early warning systems.
- 1.2.** Promote permanent, multi-party inter-commission parliamentary groups to harmonise legislative efforts on SDG 16.4, the ATT, and the UN PoA, in accordance with PARLATINO's procedures.
- 1.3.** Encourage actively groups with low political representation, especially women and young parliamentarians to be involved in drafting and promoting legislation, balancing youth and senior experience.

2. OVERSIGHT

- 2.1.** Work closely with the executive, striving to ensure that the necessary agencies, instruments, and budgets are in place to fulfil SDG 16.4, the ATT, and the UN PoA, as well as UNSCRs 1325 and 2250. Additionally, promote coordination between agencies, avoid duplication of efforts, and harmonise with international processes.
- 2.2.** Introduce parliamentary consultation and approval procedures for arms export and import decisions to enhance transparency and accountability, particularly regarding decisions related to the export of arms to conflict and post-conflict zones, as well as providing an annual public report on arms exports and imports.
- 2.3.** Promote and implement systematic gender-disaggregated data collection on firearm-related deaths and injuries to inform policies on the prevention of armed violence.

3. AWARENESS-RAISING

- 3.1.** Approach government officials to inquire about the current status; in countries where the ratification of the ATT and the reporting on the UN PoA have been postponed, parliamentarians should identify the reasons: for example, lack of political will, excessive bureaucracy, or insufficient technical capacity/trained personnel to handle the ratification processes.
- 3.2.** Make visible and increase understanding of the human, economic, and social costs of small arms and light weapons and their effects on women, men, girls, boys, and adolescents.

⁵ The recommendations were identified at the regional seminar in Latin America and the Caribbean on June 31-July 1 2023.

- 3.3. Engage with civil society organisations, especially youth organisations, government agencies, and their constituencies to create awareness initiatives aimed at informing the public about the consequences and costs of armed violence in order to seek the necessary solutions.

Parliamentary recommendations, Middle East and North Africa⁶

1. LEGISLATION

- 1.1. Ensure the universalisation, domestication, and implementation of SDG 16, ATT, UN PoA, and UNSCRs 1325 and 2250, including different aspects ranging from drafting of legislation to budget allocations, and work towards that politically binding instruments and tools for arms control to be legally binding and mandatory for all UN member states.
- 1.2. Ensure that international and regional treaties and instruments related to the topic of SALW control are established, signed, ratified and implemented by governments in compliance with International Humanitarian Law.
- 1.3. Elaborate and establish National Action Plans specifically related to the topic of illicit SALW and the ATT and the WPS agenda.

2. OVERSIGHT

- 2.1. Prioritise oversight of the government by relevant parliamentary committees, including actions such as tabling questions, motions and interpellations to relevant government institutions and officials. For those countries where implementation and/or reporting are slow or delayed, parliamentarians should identify the reasons: e.g. lack of political will, administrative red tape, and lack of technical capacity / trained personnel to deal with reporting issues.
- 2.2. Ensure financial sustainability such as encouraging governments to secure sufficient funding for effective implementation through state budget or external sources e.g. the ATT Voluntary Trust Fund and/or secure the allocation of the necessary budgets to allow state agencies to collect statistics relevant that facilitates the evaluation of implementation.
- 2.3. Promote inter-agency coordination and establish cooperation to avoid duplication of efforts and harmonise with international efforts and hold regular meetings between cross-party groups of legislators and the ministers responsible.

3. AWARENESS-RAISING

- 3.1. Raise awareness on the negative socio-psychological effects of the irresponsible usage of SALW among civilian population, including women, youth and children.
- 3.2. Raise awareness on the universalisation and implementation of SDG 16, ATT, UN PoA and UNSCRs 1325 and 2250 among fellow parliamentarians, both in relevant committees and in the plenary and include experts in the dialogue to underpin rationale.
- 3.3. Promote the development of formal or informal cross-party groups/networks in order to raise awareness on SALW-related violence and champion relevant instruments to curb the uncontrolled flow and use of illicit SALW.

⁶ The recommendations were identified at PFSALW's regional seminar in the Middle East and North Africa on 12–13 June 2024.

Global Recommendations⁷

1. LEGISLATION

- 1.1. Include the gender equality and youth perspective when working with legislation regarding SALW control, both in terms of content in the legislation as well as promoting women's and youth's participation and leadership roles in the legislative process.
- 1.2. Integrate SALW action plans into national development strategies; including in the National Action Plans about the WPS agenda.
- 1.3. Enhance engagement with a variety of stakeholders, such as civil society, agencies and the government, including through consultations related to the drafting process of new legislation or amendments on SALW-related processes and the WPS agenda, as well as evaluation, as to ensure inclusion of a wider range of perspectives and efficient implementation.

2. OVERSIGHT

- 2.1. Promote the use of parliamentary control tools to improve the implementation of the ATT and encourage the adoption of related gender responsive public policies and strategies.
- 2.2. Stay informed by seeking advice from civil society organisations and research institutes in the oversight tasks, as these can provide expertise, experiences and voice issues.
- 2.3. Form regional interparliamentary commissions with the objective of monitoring regional trade in SALW and harmonisation of national legislations.

3. AWARENESS-RAISING

- 3.1. Approach parliamentary leadership (presidents, committee chairpersons, group leaders, etc.) to include the issue of signing, ratifying, and implementing the ATT on the agenda.
- 3.2. Promote the development of formal or informal cross-party groups/networks to raise awareness on SALW-related violence and champion relevant instruments.
- 3.3. Disseminate to the public; reports, policy statements and relevant data on SALW-related violence, and the importance of ratification and implementation of the ATT, through the media.

⁷ The recommendations were identified at PFSALW's international seminar held on December 13–14, 2023, in Geneva. The recommendations are based on the regional efforts and the subsequent adoption of the PAPs. During the seminar, parliamentarians from the project's focus regions gathered to promote the achievement of set outcomes through inter-regional exchanges on good practices and to evaluate the actions taken within the project.

Conclusion

The policy publication underscores the vital roles of parliamentarians in addressing the prevention and reduction of SALW-related violence through legislation, oversight, and awareness-raising efforts. At the aforementioned regional and international seminars, parliamentarians and other relevant stakeholders gathered to identify the needs and recommendations for further enhancement of the universalisation and implementation of the ATT, resulting in the PFSALW's first-ever PAPs in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East, with specific focus on the ATT linking to the WPS agenda.

PFSALW would like to extend sincere appreciation to the partner organisations and everyone that actively contributed to the project. Furthermore, PFSALW wishes to reiterate heartfelt gratitude to the donor of the project, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Canada, and the Weapons Threat Reduction Program (WTRP), for their trust and support of PFSALW's work.

Based on the collective efforts of all involved, which culminated in the present policy publication, PFSALW is confident the publication will serve as a lasting foundation for parliamentary action and as a roadmap for parliamentarians globally in their further vital efforts to advance ATT universalisation and implementation, and its connection to the WPS agenda.




Visiting address:

Gustavslundsvägen 18
167 51 Bromma, Sweden

Postal address:

Parlamentarikerforum för lätta vapen-frågor
C/o Ekumeniska centret
Box 14038
167 14 Bromma, Sweden



 +46 (0) 8 653 25 43

 secretariat@parlforum.org

 @PFSALW

 @ParlForumSALW

 www.linkedin.com/company/pfsalw

 parliamentaryforum.org