

## Regional Seminar for the MENA-region

*“Reducing threats to international security: Mobilising parliamentarians from the Middle East to strengthen global parliamentary action for enhanced universalisation and implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty”*

### Concept Note

Venue: Amman, Jordan

15-16 November, 2023

### Introduction

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 1 billion of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) are circulating worldwide, 85% in the hands of civilians<sup>1</sup>, causing the death of approximately 211 000 people every year.<sup>2</sup> SALW-related violence has severe and disruptive effects on sustainable development, good governance and contributes to the persistence of armed conflict. The number of forcibly displaced people due to conflict, violence, persecution and human rights violations has reached over 108 million, the highest number since the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) records began.<sup>3</sup> The situations behind forced displacement are highly linked to the uncontrolled flow 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. Moreover, the illicit SALW-proliferation facilitates violations of human rights, gender-based violence and impedes economic investment.

According to the Global Peace Index (GPI) 2022, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is the least peaceful region in the world for the seventh consecutive year.<sup>4</sup> On the same note, among the 25 countries with the highest estimation of civilian-held legal and illicit firearms, six are located in the MENA region.<sup>5</sup> This situation makes evident the urgent need for SALW control in the region, in order to achieve more peaceful and sustainably developed societies.

### 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

---

<sup>1</sup> 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>

<sup>2</sup> Small Arms Survey (2022), *Global Violent Deaths in 2020*, available at:

<https://smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-GVD-July-2022-update.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR (2023), *Figures at glance*, accessed 2023-08-22: <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>

<sup>4</sup> Institute for Economics & Peace (2022), *Global Peace Index 2022*, available at:

<https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/GPI-2022-web.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> 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>



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 300 members in over 100 countries across Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean and the Middle East. The overall vision 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: policy-shaping, capacity-development and awareness-raising. By serving as a platform for inter-parliamentary dialogue, consensus building, exchange of good practices and harmonisation of initiatives, PFSALW supports the development of parliamentarians' capabilities to realise their full potential in preventing and reducing SALW-related violence through legislative, oversight, and awareness-raising actions.

PFSALW has been active in the MENA region since 2010 and has enjoyed fruitful cooperation with parliamentarians, parliaments, civil society and diplomatic community in the region; organising seminars and providing its members from the MENA with capacity-developing, policy-shaping and awareness-raising support to enhance parliamentary action for the prevention and reduction of armed violence. In 2016, the PFSALW and the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa realised a regional seminar for parliamentarians and other relevant stakeholders in Alexandria, Egypt. Furthermore, in 2019, the PFSALW organised a productive regional seminar in cooperation with the Swedish Embassy in Amman, Jordan, hosted at the Generations For Peace (GFP), for parliamentarians and young civil society representatives with focus on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda and the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Agenda. The seminar resulted in the adoption of a regional Parliamentary Action Plan (PAP), serving as a tool for strengthening parliamentary action in the field of armed violence reduction and prevention.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Swedish Embassy in Amman, Jordan**

The Embassy of Sweden in Jordan opened in 1981. Over the years, Swedish-Jordanian relations have developed and strengthened, building on mutual trust between the two states. The royal houses of Amman and Stockholm have good relations and the two governments work closely together on multilateral issues. The Embassy's work on the topic in question is guided by the strategy for Sweden's regional development cooperation with the MENA 2021 – 2025, with the explicit objective to contribute to peaceful and inclusive societies and reduce the illicit proliferation of SALW, as well as the WPS- and YPS Agenda.

### **Objective of the seminar**

The seminar planned forms part of a PFSALW project financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Canada, titled *“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”*. As indicated in the title, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and the Middle East are the focus regions of the project. Additional to the seminar in MENA, a regional seminar in Latin America and the Caribbean is planned for 2023. A regional seminar in Asia was held in 2022 within the project. The seminar is planned to strengthen parliamentary knowledge for the universalisation and

---

<sup>6</sup> PFSALW (2019), *Multi-stakeholder dialogue: Parliamentary Action on the 2030 Agenda – SALW control in the MENA region*, available at: <https://parliamentaryforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Parliamentary-Action-Plan-MENA-2019-English.pdf>



implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), linking to the WPS agenda, as well as to identify the most prioritised actions to be compiled in a regional PAP specifically related to the topic on the ATT. Moreover, a side event at the Ninth Conference of State Parties to the ATT (CSP9) was organised on the 24 August 2023 to promote parliamentary participation and leverage in international processes. Additionally, based on the regional efforts within the project in Asia, Latin America and Caribbean and MENA respectively, an international seminar will be hosted to promote the achievement of set outcomes through inter-regional exchange on good practices and to evaluate actions taken thus far. Conclusions and recommendations will be compiled in a parliamentary policy publication to serve as a road-map for parliamentarians globally working on the ATT. Towards the end of 2023, the conclusions and recommendations will also be shared with all PFSALW's members and the wider public in an international social media campaign.

The regional seminar in MENA is targeting parliamentarians from the region with specific consideration towards equal inclusion of women parliamentarians in the seminar as to enhance women's active role and participation in peace and security processes. The project also aims at identifying synergies between the ATT and the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), as well as other relevant international frameworks.

### **Background – armed violence in the MENA region**

Since 2008, the GPI has reported an increase in the access to SALW globally, which has resulted in several severe consequences.<sup>7</sup> Apart from causing the death of approximately 211 000 people every year and injuring many more<sup>8</sup>, uncontrolled SALW-proliferation facilitates violations of human rights, gender-based violence and impede economic investment by draining public resources away from socio-economic development.

According to the GPI, MENA is the least peaceful region in the world for the seventh consecutive year.<sup>9</sup> On the same note, among the 25 countries with the highest estimation of civilian-held legal and illicit firearms six are located in the MENA region: Yemen, Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan and Egypt.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, SALW trade transparency is weak in several countries<sup>11</sup> as well as the ratification of the ATT. In the region, only three UN Member States are state parties to the Treaty: Afghanistan, Lebanon and Palestine.<sup>12</sup> The high prevalence of SALW in combination with the lack of transparency, arms control and arms trade regulations results in severe consequences such as armed violence, armed conflicts, terrorism and violent extremism.<sup>13</sup> Having stated this, the need for SALW control in the region is urgent as the present prevalence of SALW compromises the development of peaceful and sustainably developed societies. Parliamentarians

---

<sup>7</sup> Institute for Economics & Peace (2022), *Global Peace Index 2022*, available at:

<https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/GPI-2022-web.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Small Arms Survey (2022), *Global Violent Deaths in 2020*, available at: <https://smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-GVD-July-2022-update.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Institute for Economics & Peace (2022), *Global Peace Index 2022*, available at:

<https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/GPI-2022-web.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> 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>

<sup>11</sup> Small Arms Survey (2021), *The 2021 Small Arms Trade Transparency Barometer*, available at:

<https://smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-BP-TB21.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Arms Trade Treaty, *Treaty Status*, accessed 2023-02-08: <https://thearmstradetreaty.org/treaty-status.html?templateId=209883>

<sup>13</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) (2018), *Arms transfers and SALW controls in the Middle East and North Africa: Mapping capacity-building efforts*, available at: [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/bp\\_1811\\_att\\_mena\\_1.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/bp_1811_att_mena_1.pdf)



are crucial actors in efforts to prevent SALW-related violence due to their legislative, oversight and awareness-raising functions.

Furthermore, women's political participation in MENA is low and only 16.9 % of parliamentary seats are held by women – the lowest share across all regions worldwide.<sup>14</sup> The situation underlines the need for further efforts towards strengthening's women's active participation in decision making, especially based on the important contribution and perspective of women in peace and security processes.

### **Implementation, results and impact**

The seminar seeks to provide parliamentarians from the MENA region 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 will be compiled in a regional PAP to be adopted by the parliamentarians at the seminar. The PAP is intended to serve as a basis for the subsequent policy publication to be elaborated within the project. In addition, the results of the seminar and the PAP shall support parliamentarians oversight function in relation to their governments, facilitate their participation as part of their government delegations in international meetings related to aforementioned international instruments, and serve as a platform for parliamentary action at the national, regional and international policy levels. Finally, the seminar 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 and universalisation of the ATT.

By participating in the seminar, parliamentarians will benefit from the following:

- Improved expertise and policy knowledge on the ATT, the WPS agenda and other relevant frameworks related to SALW control.
- Opportunity to take part of policy relevant exchanges with parliamentarians from the MENA region as well as with relevant experts and other stakeholders.
- Use of the political platform and spotlight that PFSALW and the Embassy in Amman provide in connection to the regional and international policy levels, which will further advance and highlight the profile of parliamentarians and their efforts related to peace, security and SALW control initiatives.
- Possibility to be active part of PFSALW's membership base, gaining access to its parliamentary network, receive policy support and backing from the political leverage provided by PFSALW.
- Depending on his/her actions, the parliamentarians will benefit from strengthened political relevance and recognition, in the respective national contexts and as members of PFSALW, being considered as knowledgeable and able to interact at the national, regional and international levels, liaise with different stakeholders, as well as able to work towards prevention and reduction of SALW-related violence.
- Participation in the seminar requires the parliamentarian to commit to take action on the thematic issues in question in the national, regional or international context based on

---

<sup>14</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (2022), *Women in Parliament in 2021*, available at: <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2022-03/women-in-parliament-in-2021>



knowledge gained in the activity, as well as preparedness to participate in follow-up dialogue with PFSALW after the seminar.

Expected profile of the parliamentarians from MENA:

- Member of a committee relevant to the prevention of SALW-related violence and issues of security and disarmament, which include the implementation of the ATT, WPS, the 2030 Agenda and the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons (UN PoA).
- Commitment towards armed violence prevention and reduction initiatives.
- Willingness/readiness to have an active role in relation to the topics of the seminar, for example contacting the government, speaking in the parliament, raising awareness.
- Readiness/willingness to liaise with PFSALW to further discuss actions, follow up and evaluation steps, related to the common objective of contributing to armed violence prevention and reduction.
- Commitment to the gender equality perspective, which will be considered to the extent possible by PFSALW and its partners in the selection process as well as the structure and thematic content of the seminar, in order to promote the advancement of the WPS agenda.

In sum, parliamentarians will gain access to policy relevant tools and a specialised political platform, allowing them to take an active role in relation to the thematic topic of the seminar, both at the national, regional and international levels, and take advantage of the policy knowledge, the momentum and the support that PFSALW together with its partners can provide prior, during and after the seminar. Therefore, it is expected that the parliamentarians commit to take action at their national parliaments and at the regional and international levels, in form of speeches, media interventions, tabling questions to different authorities, as well as other means of parliamentary action.