Sixty-sixth session
Item 98 (k) and (t) of the provisional agenda*
General and complete disarmament

Assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons and collecting them

The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report provides an overview of the activities undertaken by Member States, the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations regarding the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 65/50 and 65/64, which cover the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and the assistance to States provided in that context.

During the reporting period, from August 2010 to July 2011, particular emphasis was placed on strengthening the proper marking, record keeping and tracing capacities of States as vital steps to hold accountable those who engage in illicit transfers and the diversion of small arms.

The coordination of small arms-related activities within the United Nations has been further strengthened. Moreover, with the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, which is now being broadly used for reporting small arms transfers, along with the strengthening of implementation of the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Firearms Protocol), the possible adoption of an arms trade treaty and the forthcoming Review Conference on the Programme of Action, there is an opportunity for Member States to discuss further the relationship among these instruments in order to maximize their complementarity.

* A/66/150.
I. Introduction

1. By its resolution 65/50, entitled “Assistance to States for Curbing the Illicit Traffic in Small Arms and Light Weapons and Collecting Them”, the General Assembly invited the Secretary-General and those States and organizations that are in a position to do so to continue to provide assistance to States for curbing the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and collecting them, and encouraged cooperation among State organs, international organizations and civil society in supporting programmes and projects to this end. The General Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to continue to consider the matter and to report thereon to the Assembly at its sixty-sixth session.

2. By its resolution 65/64, entitled “The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects”, the General Assembly called upon all Member States to contribute to the continued implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects at the national, regional and global levels. It also called upon all States to implement the International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons (International Tracing Instrument) and requested the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its sixty-sixth session on the implementation of the resolution.

3. The present report is submitted pursuant to the requests made by the General Assembly in the above-mentioned resolutions. Similar to the practice of previous years, the two resolutions are addressed together in this report to enable a coherent approach to these overlapping and interconnected issues.

II. Assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons and collecting them, and implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects

A. United Nations system

1. Security Council and Peacebuilding Commission

Security Council

4. Small arms and light weapons are the main weapons used in most of the conflicts that occupy the agenda of the Security Council. During the reporting period, the Security Council addressed the issue of small arms in different contexts, in particular with regard to continuing violations of arms embargoes, children in armed conflict, and the protection of civilians in armed conflict.  


5. The Council held a meeting on the issue of small arms on 25 April 2011. The meeting took up a report of the Secretary-General (S/2011/255), which emphasized the importance of marking weapons and ammunition and their proper recording to ensure effective accounting and tracing in the event of diversion; the destruction of surplus arms and ammunition as a cost-effective way to prevent diversion; integrating traditional arms control measures into interventions that target the demand for weapons; and the importance of identifying ways to increase compliance by non-State armed groups with international norms relating to the use and stockpiling of weapons and ammunition in time of conflict. The report, including its recommendations, was received positively by the members of the Council.

6. As one of the measures stipulated under Article 41 of the Charter of the United Nations, the Security Council maintains several arms embargoes that prohibit all States from supplying arms and related materiel, and from providing related technical training or assistance, to the target State, region, individual or entity. In particular, six arms embargoes are currently in place in order to address specific conflicts that are fuelled, to a great extent, by the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, or to help ensure stability in post-conflict situations.3

7. During the period under review, the mandates of the expert groups4 that monitor the implementation on the ground of arms embargoes in respective States have been extended by the Security Council. In their reports,5 each of the expert groups recommended ways to strengthen the effectiveness of the arms embargo measure. Recent positive developments include the introduction of an electronic data management system that brings together information collected by the various monitoring groups, and regular and systematic sharing of information between sanction Committees and peacekeeping missions where they are co-located, such as in Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire.

8. Field missions mandated by the Security Council have also continued their work on small arms issues, in close cooperation with the United Nations country teams.

9. As a subsidiary body of the Security Council, the Counter-Terrorism Committee is mandated to monitor the implementation of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001), in which it is specified that all States shall eliminate the supply of weapons to terrorists. The Committee is assisted in its work by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate. As part of its technical assistance strategy, the Directorate continued its assessment visits to identify the needs of Member States and facilitate delivery of technical assistance. An important

3 The six arms embargo regimes in Africa relate to Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Somalia and the Sudan. In addition, the Council has imposed targeted arms embargoes on Al-Qaeda (see Security Council resolution 1989 (2011)) and the Taliban (see Security Council resolution 1988 (2011)) and associated individuals and entities, an arms embargo in connection with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (with the exception of the supply by States to the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea of small arms and light weapons, on which these States must notify the relevant sanctions Committee in advance), and an export ban on arms and related materiel from the Islamic Republic of Iran.


dimension of these activities is the prevention of arms smuggling in the countries in question.

**Peacebuilding Commission**

10. The issue of small arms is directly relevant to the work of the Peacebuilding Commission, especially since levels of small arms circulating in post-conflict areas can be greater than during the conflict; e.g., because of the implosion of functional government controls. Disarming ex-combatants and civilians, enacting laws and regulations pertaining to arms possession by a State’s forces and civilians, and effective stockpile management of weapons and ammunition will contribute directly to longer term stability and development. The Peacebuilding Commission, meeting in its country-specific configurations, has made recommendations related to arms control measures, so as to increase efforts to disarm the civilian population and control arms held by security and defence forces.

2. **General Assembly**

**Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects**

**Open-ended Meeting of Governmental Experts of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects**

11. In the General Assembly, the issue of small arms and light weapons is centrally discussed in meetings on the 2001 Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. By General Assembly resolution 63/72, entitled “The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects”, States decided to convene an open-ended meeting of governmental experts to address key implementation challenges and opportunities relating to particular issues and themes, including international cooperation and assistance. Following broad-based consultations, marking, record keeping and cooperation in tracing in accordance with the International Tracing Instrument were identified as the core themes for discussions by the Open-ended Meeting of Governmental Experts, which met from 9 to 13 May 2011. Participants engaged in a focused discussion, and adopted by consensus a report that referred to the topics discussed and to a Chair’s summary containing a detailed account of each thematic session.⁶

12. The Open-ended Meeting of Governmental Experts also served as an appropriate forum to explore opportunities for cooperation in technical, financial and other forms of assistance for donor and recipient countries as well as regional organizations.

13. States will decide at the Second Review Conference of the Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons, scheduled to take place from 27 August to 7 September 2012, on the possibility of scheduling further Open-ended Meeting of Governmental Experts in the future.

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Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Firearms Protocol)

14. Pursuant to the mandate received by the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has continued to raise awareness and to promote the ratification and the implementation of the Firearms Protocol, to develop technical assistance tools and to provide legislative and operational assistance to the Parties to the Protocol.

15. Among the tools developed are a self-assessment checklist for implementation of the Firearms Protocol, technical guidelines to help States parties implement the Protocol provisions and establish effective firearms control measures, and a model law on firearms.7

16. From 18 to 22 October 2010, the fifth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime was held in Vienna, which included sessions on the Firearms Protocol. The Conference requested UNODC to continue to develop technical assistance tools and to conduct a study on the transnational nature of and routes used in trafficking in firearms. It also decided to establish an open-ended intergovernmental working group on firearms, and to advise and assist the Conference in the implementation of its mandate with regard to the Firearms Protocol.8 The Conference further decided to establish an open-ended intergovernmental working group on the review of the implementation of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols thereto. Pursuant to this mandate, UNODC launched a programme to assist Member States in their endeavour to adhere to and implement the Firearms Protocol. The programme aims at strengthening Member States’ legal and institutional regimes on firearms and capacities to investigate and prosecute illicit trafficking cases. So far, the project includes selected countries in West Africa, South America and the Caribbean.

17. Given the interrelated and complementary nature of the Firearms Protocol and the Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons, States may wish to consider ways and means to facilitate greater interaction and information exchange between the respective governing bodies, with a view to encouraging the development of synergies between the activities carried out under both processes.

**Broader initiatives related to the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons**

**Arms trade treaty**

18. Important areas of world trade are covered by rules that bind countries into agreed conduct. But countries are not bound by global rules when transferring weapons. An eclectic set of national and regional control measures on arms transfers exists, but the absence of a global framework has obscured transparency and trust. Attempts within the United Nations to address issues associated with transfers of conventional arms and ammunition have focused essentially on transparency

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measures and measures to counter the illicit trade in small arms. Of these instruments, only the Firearms Protocol is legally binding.

19. In 2009, the General Assembly decided to convene the United Nations Conference on an Arms Trade Treaty in 2012. The first, second and third sessions of the Preparatory Committee for the Conference were held in July 2010, and March and July 2011, respectively. Despite the wide support for the need to negotiate an arms trade treaty, States remain divided on a number of topics, including what categories of weapons it should cover. The question of whether small arms should fall within the scope of the treaty, and, if so, whether only military style small arms or other types should also be included, remains a central one. The inclusion of ammunition in the scope of an arms trade treaty has also proven to be a contentious issue.9

20. A fourth meeting of the Preparatory Committee is scheduled to be held from 13 to 17 February 2012, followed by a four-week Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty in July 2012.

### Armed violence and development

21. Many victims of small arms are outside of immediate conflict zones. The rate of firearms-related homicides in post-conflict societies often outnumbers battlefield deaths. Also, in numerous societies where armed conflict has not occurred for decades, hundreds of thousands of people die each year from endemic crime and armed violence perpetrated with illegal weapons. Countries affected by armed violence experience particular difficulties in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

22. In 2006, a large group of countries committed themselves to the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, a diplomatic initiative aimed at addressing the interrelations between armed violence and development, which has been endorsed by over 100 States. Stemming from this initiative, the Secretary-General was requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 63/23 (see A/64/228). As a follow-up, in May 2010, representatives of interested States adopted the Oslo Commitments on Armed Violence: Achieving the Millennium Development Goals. In this document, participating States reaffirmed the commitments of the Geneva Declaration and committed themselves to operationalizing the recommendations made by the Secretary-General in the report. They focused on promoting the inclusion, where appropriate, of armed violence reduction and prevention in the outcome document of the 2010 General Assembly High-Level Plenary Meeting on the Millennium Development Goals and in subsequent Millennium Development Goals achievement strategies through 2015, to measure and monitor the incidence and impact of armed violence at national and subnational levels in a transparent way, and to develop a set of targets and indicators to assess progress in efforts to achieve measurable reductions in armed violence. As a result, at the General Assembly High-Level Plenary Meeting of September 2010 more than 60 States addressed the issue of armed violence and its link to the Millennium Development Goals.

23. During the reporting period, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in partnership with the Geneva Declaration secretariat and various

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supportive Governments, organized “promising practices” regional seminars in Guatemala, Kenya, Nepal and Nigeria, which collaborated with regional and civil society organizations to record armed violence reduction practices that appear to be yielding dividends. The resulting report will be presented to the Second Ministerial Review Conference of the Geneva Declaration in October 2011, at which it is expected that ministers will endorse a series of evidence-based practices that will serve to operationalize the Geneva Declaration and the Oslo Commitments on Armed Violence.

24. The Armed Violence Prevention Programme, an inter-agency programme within the United Nations system aimed at promoting effective multisectoral responses to armed violence, is now entering its implementation phase. In late 2010, the Programme identified six focus countries as potential recipients of integrated armed violence prevention assistance on the ground and work is currently under way to operationalize that assistance.

United Nations Register of Conventional Arms

25. The United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, in operation since 1991, is a primary transparency instrument of the United Nations, through which States exchange information on trade, as well as procurement and national holdings of conventional weapons in seven pre-defined categories. Since 2003, States have reported on a voluntary basis on their small arms transfers.

26. To date, 72 Member States have reported on their exports and imports of small arms to the Register — or the absence of such transfers — at least once. The trend of States including small arms transfers in their reports on conventional arms transfers to the Register is rising sharply. In 2010, almost two thirds of the States that reported to the Register included small arms, up from less than 10 per cent when optional reporting on small arms was first introduced in 2003.

3. United Nations Coordinating Action on Small Arms

27. The United Nations Coordinating Action on Small Arms mechanism (CASA) was created in 1998 to foster a coherent multidisciplinary approach within the United Nations system regarding small arms policy and programming. CASA partners — now 23 entities — have contributed to the implementation of the Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons, in particular through analyses of national reports, capacity-building, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, weapons collection and destruction, research on the impact of small arms on children and adolescents, and ensuring the integration of gender mainstreaming concerns in national policies.

International Small Arms Control Standards

28. In 2010, under the auspices of CASA, work continued on the development of the International Small Arms Control Standards (ISACS). The objective of this project is to enhance the effectiveness of policymaking and programming across the United Nations system by providing clear and comprehensive guidance to practitioners and policymakers on a wide range of small arms-related issues. The first set of the ISACS modules were presented to the biennial meeting of States to consider the implementation of the Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons that was held in July 2010. Furthermore, CASA has started to conduct a
A wide range of broad-based consultations on all modules, involving Member States, regional organizations, industry representatives, academia and non-governmental organizations. The objective of these consultations is to fine tune and finalize ISACS; the consultation phase is expected to continue through 2011.

Programme of Action Implementation Support System

29. Since the launch of the Programme of Action Implementation Support System in July 2008, this key web-based tool has continued to evolve as the one-stop-shop for information on all elements relevant to the implementation of the Programme of Action. The Support System was further upgraded and enhanced during the reporting period. An electronic combined reporting template for the Programme of Action and the International Tracing Instrument has been added. Also, the System has become a platform for matching needs in the area of capacity-building for small arms-related activities with available resources.

30. The Programme of Action Implementation Support System is funded from extrabudgetary resources; its operation is therefore dependent on available funding. For the period 2011-2012 such resources have been secured. The continuous operation of the Programme of Action Implementation Support System beyond 2012 remains dependent upon availability of voluntary contributions.

International ammunition technical guidelines

31. Member States have acknowledged the dangers posed by the excessive accumulation of conventional ammunition, and have requested the United Nations to develop guidelines for their proper stockpiling. Hence, in 2009 the United Nations started developing the international ammunition technical guidelines. These guidelines would contribute to reducing the risk of accidental stockpile explosions, enhance peace and security by minimizing the risk of diversion of ammunition, provide technical information that could be readily accessed by practitioners in the area of stockpile management, and facilitate the work of the United Nations in handling stockpiles of ammunition in the context of its peacekeeping operations and peacebuilding activities. A technical review panel consisting of experts from several States and the United Nations Mine Action Service was established to provide expert knowledge on existing national and regional good practices with a view to rendering the technical guidelines as comprehensive and globally applicable as possible. The development of the international ammunition technical guidelines is expected to be completed in 2011.

4. Group of Interested States

32. The Group of Interested States in Practical Disarmament Measures was established in 1996 as an informal open forum in New York to consider measures to deal with conflict and post-conflict situations through the control of small arms and light weapons, demining, and demobilization and reintegration of former combatants. Over the past year, the Group of Interested States discussed issues such as the preparations for the Meeting of Governmental Experts, the matching of needs and resources in the implementation of the Programme of Action, gender

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10 General Assembly resolution 63/61.
11 See General Assembly resolution 51/45 N.
considerations regarding small arms, and the role of small arms control measures in conflict prevention.

33. The Group of Interested States successfully facilitated in a number of cases the matching of small arms-related assistance needs formulated by affected countries, with donor States interested in funding such needs. This was facilitated by a compilation of assistance proposals prepared by the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs on the basis of information provided in national reports submitted by Member States on the implementation of the Programme of Action. This new role for the Group of Interested States was taken up on the basis of the report of the Fourth Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, which stipulates that “in order to identify, prioritize and communicate needs and match them with resources, States are encouraged to build on existing mechanisms … and to consider other ways in which needs and resources can be matched effectively and assistance and cooperation can be more effectively coordinated, including by exploring opportunities for increasing dialogue between States; … in order to better identify donors for … proposals and to increase the visibility of available assistance, States encouraged intensified efforts among all States, international and regional organizations and civil society” (A/CONF.192/BMS/2010/3).

B. Activities undertaken at the regional and subregional levels

Africa

34. During the reporting period, the Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa assisted African Member States and the African Union in drafting an African strategy to address the threats posed by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The Regional Centre provided key support to the drafting and conclusion of the Central African Convention for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and All Parts and Components that Can Be Used for Their Manufacture, Repair and Assembly (Kinshasa Convention).

35. The Regional Centre also provided Member States with legal and political support in their review and update of national legislation on small arms. Furthermore, the Centre assisted in building the capacities of Member States to control brokering activities through electronic licensing systems, and it engaged in capacity-building activities in support of African subregional organizations in implementing subregional legal instruments to control illicit small arms and subregional action plans. 13

36. Regional organizations in Africa, including the African Union, the Economic Community for Central African States, the Economic Community of West African States, the Regional Centre on Small Arms for the Great Lakes Region, the Horn of Africa and Bordering States, and the Southern African Development Community, which mainly deals with small arms issues through the Southern African Regional Police Chiefs Cooperation Organization, have continued to provide assistance to States on the issue of small arms and light weapons.

13 See A/66/159.
Americas

37. During the reporting period, the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean increased its assistance to Member States in the region. The assistance included an inter-institutional training course to help build or enhance the capacity of law enforcement and judicial personnel, to better control small arms and to combat more effectively illicit small arms trafficking. The Regional Centre provided assistance to States in the Caribbean to improve stockpile management and small arms destruction. The Regional Centre also provided legal assistance to States in the region in aligning national legislation with global and regional instruments on small arms, and carried out activities to assist States in reducing and preventing armed violence in the region. 14

38. Regional organizations in the Americas, including the Organization of American States, the Andean Community, the Caribbean Community, and the Central American Integration System, have continued to provide assistance to States in the region on the issue of small arms and light weapons.

Asia and the Pacific

39. During the reporting period, the Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific focused on fostering and supporting regional discussions and cooperation on combating illicit small arms and light weapons. It also promoted national and regional actions on armed violence reduction and prevention, as well as on the arms trade treaty. 15

40. Regional organizations in Asia and the Pacific, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Pacific Islands Forum, have continued to provide assistance to States in their region on the issue of small arms and light weapons.

III. Observations and conclusions

41. Following the outcome of the Fourth Biennial Meeting of States on the implementation of the Programme of Action in 2010, renewed emphasis was placed on strengthening the capacity of States regarding the proper marking, record keeping and tracing of small arms and light weapons. These issues were central discussion points at the Open-ended Meeting of Governmental Experts held in May 2011, and figured prominently in the recommendations contained in the 2011 report of the Secretary-General on small arms to the Security Council (S/2011/255). At the 2012 Review Conference on the Programme of Action, which will include a review of the implementation of the International Tracing Instrument, Member States will be able to further assess the state of implementation on marking, record keeping and tracing of small arms. At that conference, they may also wish to “consider recommending convening a further open-ended meeting of governmental experts”. 16

42. The multifaceted nature of the small arms issue implies that discussions on it are not limited to traditional arms control and disarmament forums. The topic may

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14 See A/66/140.
15 See A/66/113.
16 General Assembly resolution 65/64.
also come up in other contexts, including, e.g., counter-terrorism, social and economic development, transnational organized crime, child soldiers or human rights issues. This requires increased coordination within and outside of the United Nations.

43. Moreover, with the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, which is now being broadly used for reporting small arms transfers, along with the strengthening of implementation of the Firearms Protocol, the possible adoption of an arms trade treaty and the forthcoming Review Conference on the Programme of Action, there is an opportunity for Member States to discuss further the relationship among these instruments in order to maximize their complementarity.