FACT SHEET

TRANSPARENCY: UNITED NATIONS REGISTER OF CONVENTIONAL ARMS

Many governments regularly report their arms imports and exports to the United Nations. Sharing annual reports on weapons transfers creates trust between countries, and can help determine whether excessive or destabilising accumulations of arms take place. Also, being open about armaments may encourage restraint in the transfer or production of arms, and can contribute to preventive diplomacy. Transparency is as important for those countries that are large-scale arms traders, as it is for those importing or exporting few or no weapons.

In 1991 the General Assembly created the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms: an annual reporting mechanism through which governments indicate the quantity and type of arms they transferred the previous year. Member States reporting to it provide important information on the build-up and volume of conventional arsenals which may help a country maintain a credible defence and perform effective peacekeeping tasks.

What to report?

The UN Register has a progressive structure for reporting, the minimum being seven agreed-to categories of military equipment

I. Battle tanks
II. Armoured combat vehicles
III. Large-calibre artillery systems
IV. Combat aircraft
V. Attack helicopters
VI. Warships
VII. Missiles / missile launchers

Additionally, countries can report on:
- Small arms & light weapons

Furthermore, countries can report on:
- Military holdings
- Procurement through national production
- Relevant policies / national legislation

“There is a surprising commonality across countries in the signals that build confidence ... Measures to improve transparency of information and decision-making processes can be important in building confidence, as well as laying the basis for sustained institutional transformation.”

World Development Report 2011 on Conflict, Security, and Development

“There is the greatest asset a country can have.”

President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia
Why these weapons categories?

The Register’s ability to achieve its declared aim depends on how well it covers all relevant weapons categories, and the extent of participation by governments. **Currently, the Register focuses primarily on transfers of seven categories of heavy weapons.** In 2003, countries decided that they could also report to the Register on **small arms.** Most countries submitting reports now include small arms in their yearly submissions.

Review every three years

When the General Assembly created the Register, it also called for its subsequent regular review in order to assess progress made and consider its further development. It was understood that as new weapons systems appear they may need to be included in it. For instance, unmanned aerial vehicles are now widely used – but not part of the Register yet. Since 1994, the Register has been reviewed at intervals of three years and its scope has been modestly expanded.

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**Facts:**

- Since its inception in 1991, the UN Register has received reports from more than 170 States. The vast majority of official transfers are captured in the Register.
- On average, more than 100 countries report annually to the Register. These include all large arms exporting states.
- The vast majority of official transfers of the seven main categories are therefore captured in the Register – some researchers say well over 90%.

Governments can report online, at [www.un-register.org](http://www.un-register.org). All information received from countries is made available on this website. UNODA stands ready to assist Member States in submitting their report.

Contact: conventionalarms-unoda@un.org.

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**Using the UN Register in post-conflict situations**

The UN Register has been identified as a tool for assessing the military hardware needs of a country coming out of conflict and/or closing in on the end of its arms embargo.

UN Security Council expert panels on Côte d’Ivoire and Sudan have each recommended that these countries submit a baseline assessment to the Register of their arms acquisitions and holdings. That would offer a basis for discussion on what weapons systems would be appropriate in the new security situation for the armed forces to import.

[www.un.org/disarmament](http://www.un.org/disarmament)