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**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**

New York, 14-18 June 2010

**Discussion paper on international cooperation
and assistance**

**Layout of the issue (importance of the issue on the agenda of the
Fourth Biennial Meeting of States)**

1. Facilitation of international cooperation and assistance is at the core of international efforts to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects, and is critical to effective implementation of the Programme of Action. Reflecting the importance of the issue, multiple paragraphs of the Programme of Action are devoted to its consideration and it was most recently considered as both a stand-alone and cross-cutting issue at the Third Biennial Meeting of States. The issue continues, rightly, to be considered in the context of the Fourth Biennial Meeting.

2. It is imperative that the difference between cooperation and assistance is understood. Both concepts are important and, indeed, essential for effective implementation of the Programme of Action.

3. The term “international assistance” is often used to denote the transfer of resources and expertise, including financial and technical resources, from one country to another with a view to building national capacity for effective implementation of the Programme of Action.

4. “International cooperation” is a broader term, covering all forms of joint or coordinated action between two or more States, including the sharing of information and experience, in support of Programme of Action implementation.

Institutional framework

5. On the international level, the Programme of Action and relevant General Assembly resolutions form the basis for discussions on small arms and light



weapons, including in relation to cooperation and assistance. In addition, the Security Council has held several relevant thematic debates on these issues. However, there are a number of regional and subregional efforts which are also relevant, including the recent negotiation of a new legally binding regional instrument.¹ Finally, the activities of United Nations and intergovernmental agencies should not be ignored.

6. Section III of the Programme of Action is devoted to cooperation and assistance. It recognizes, *inter alia*, the following:

- States are primarily responsible for solving the problem of illicit trade in small arms and light weapons; however, international cooperation is needed to assist with this endeavour
- States undertake to cooperate so as to ensure coordination, complementarity and synergy in efforts at all levels and to encourage and strengthen cooperation and partnership at all levels and between all relevant stakeholders
- States and international/regional organizations should, upon request:
 - Consider rendering assistance (both technical and financial) to support implementation
 - Assist and promote conflict prevention
 - Build capacities, including development of legislation, law enforcement, tracing and marking, stockpile management and security, destruction of small arms and light weapons and collection and exchange of information
 - Support training in stockpile management and security
 - Provide assistance in destruction or other responsible disposal of surplus stocks or unmarked or inadequately marked small arms and light weapons
 - Provide assistance to combat illicit small arms and light weapons linked to drug trafficking, organized crime and terrorism
- States and international/regional organizations should cooperate, develop and strengthen partnerships to share resources and information
- States should enhance cooperation and the exchange of experience and training among competent officials on the national, regional and international levels
- Regional and international programmes for specialist training on small arms stockpile management and security should be developed
- States are encouraged to use and support (including by providing information) the INTERPOL international weapons and explosives tracking system database or any other relevant database
- States are encouraged to examine technologies that could improve tracing and detection of illicit trade as well as ways to facilitate technology transfer

¹ At the thirtieth ministerial meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, negotiations were concluded on the Central African Convention for the control of small arms and light weapons, their ammunition, parts and components that can be used for their manufacture, repair or assembly (30 April 2010).

- States undertake to cooperate in tracing illicit small arms and light weapons, in particular in relation to strengthening information exchange
- States are encouraged to exchange information on national marking systems
- States are encouraged to enhance mutual legal assistance and other forms of cooperation to assist investigations and prosecutions
- Regional or international organizations should support disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, in particular in post-conflict situations
- States should improve efforts related to human and sustainable development
- Stakeholders should develop and support action-oriented research to improve awareness and understanding of the nature and scope of the problem

7. Other parts of the Programme of Action include language on cooperation and assistance, including in relation to the need for urgent action, the importance of information exchange and the potential for increased regional cooperation. The Programme of Action also highlights the role of civil society in international cooperation and assistance.

8. As to next steps, the Programme of Action specifically highlights (in part IV) the need for further steps to enhance international cooperation in preventing, combating and eradicating illicit brokering in small arms and light weapons. Part IV also encourages all initiatives to mobilize resources and expertise.

9. In its most recent resolution on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects,² the General Assembly reiterates the importance of international cooperation and assistance to implement the Programme of Action. Specifically, it emphasizes “that initiatives by the international community with respect to international cooperation and assistance remain essential and complementary to national implementation efforts, as well as to those at the regional and global levels”.

10. Resolution 64/30, entitled “Assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons and collecting them”, also emphasizes the importance of cooperation and assistance, in particular in West Africa and the Sahelo-Saharan subregion. Moreover, it highlights the role of civil society and national commissions in the implementation of the Programme of Action.

11. The Security Council has also issued statements on the issue, the most recent of which relates to the specific issue of small arms and light weapons as a threat to peace and security in the Central African subregion.³ The statement encourages increased cooperation among States of the subregion and calls upon international partners to build and strengthen their capacities by addressing the illicit arms trafficking, in particular, of small arms and light weapons through an approach of common and shared responsibility.

12. The Secretary-General’s most recent report on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons⁴ highlights the range of regionally instigated cooperation and assistance that is already taking place.

² General Assembly resolution 64/50.

³ S/PRST/2010/6 of 19 March 2010.

⁴ A/64/173.

13. United Nations agencies are also doing their part. The Secretary-General's report outlines the assistance activities of Security Council expert bodies, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the Office for Disarmament Affairs, the United Nations Children's Fund, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the World Health Organization.

14. The United Nations Coordinating Action on Small Arms mechanism has also been reinvigorated and work has commenced on the international small arms control standards.

15. The regional centres for peace and disarmament also have a role in facilitating field-level regional responses to implementation of the Programme of Action. The centres can also assist in identifying and responding to specific assistance needs and in fostering cooperation.

16. Finally, the intergovernmental organization, INTERPOL, continues to develop its work to assist in firearms intelligence.

Priority issues

17. There are both process-related and substantive issues which could be addressed during the Fourth Biennial Meeting of States.

18. Member States continue to highlight the need for assistance and cooperation in a range of issues, including:

- Preparation of national legislation
- Establishment of a national commission
- Strengthening of national capacities, including the training of national authorities in the prevention and combating of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons
- Stockpile management
- Provision of training in, and provision of, marking machines
- Weapons collection programmes
- Cooperation among law enforcement and training facilities

19. With regard to broader and more procedural issues, States have highlighted the importance of improving the identification and communication of needs and available resources, and strengthening the matching of needs and resources.

20. States have also stressed the need to improve inter-agency cooperation, involving joint or coordinated action between law enforcement, intelligence and arms control officials, as well as information-sharing among these and other agencies.

21. In tackling the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects, the Programme of Action stresses the need to promote dialogue and a culture of peace, prevent crime and conflict, and pursue negotiated solutions to conflicts,

including by addressing their root causes. In discussions on this set of issues at the Fourth Biennial Meeting, States could highlight the importance of international cooperation for practical implementation.

22. In addition, States have identified the development and implementation of public awareness programmes on the problems and consequences of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects.

Measures that could be adopted

23. It is clear that many of the needs and priorities identified in the outcome document of the Third Biennial Meeting of States remain relevant and could be re-emphasized at the Fourth Biennial Meeting. These include:

- Recognizing that current efforts to promote information exchange, cooperation, national experience and lessons learned have been constructive, but more needs to be done
- Emphasizing the importance of national coordinating bodies and stressing ongoing support for their establishment and activities
- Preparing adequate national legislation and strengthening national capacities to combat the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons
- Stressing the importance of enhancing information exchange on national experiences and lessons learned
- Encouraging the enhancement of practical cooperation to combat cross-border and related criminal activity, including information exchange among regional and subregional organizations
- Stressing the need for continued efforts on research
- Highlighting the need for donors to provide information on the assistance available and to achieve better coordination among themselves
- Encouraging donors to consider the provision of knowledge and expertise
- Encouraging donors to provide technical and financial assistance to facilitate technology transfer and assistance for the implementation of regional agreements
- Stressing the need for States to develop their capacity to assess their assistance needs and translate them into concrete plans
- Encouraging the inclusion of assistance needs in national action plans
- Encouraging increased use of national reports
- Encouraging the use of existing resources, including the Programme of Action and the UNIDIR database
- Highlighting the importance of regional and subregional organizations
- Stressing the importance of civil society

24. However, given the maturity of the Biennial Meeting of States process, it may be time to identify concrete ways in which to improve implementation. Since the

adoption of the Programme of Action, the international community has actively considered international cooperation and assistance. Member States have engaged and reported (to varying degrees), UNIDIR has conducted research, a variety of regional meetings and workshops have been held (both under the auspices of, and independent of, the United Nations) and the Programme of Action implementation support system has been established.

25. States are aware of the challenges and have worked towards creating some of the mechanisms necessary to address them. While these mechanisms will continue to evolve, it may now be time for the international community to move forward in order to improve its approach to matching needs and resources, in particular in relation to the provision of assistance.

26. Some States are outlining their needs in national reports. However, the outcome document of the Biennial Meeting could recognize the need for an increased understanding of how needs can be identified, prioritized and communicated, and how resources can be requested from donors. The document could encourage all States to use national reports to identify assistance needs and could consider ways in which the international community could follow-up on assistance requests in order to match donors and recipients. Efforts to match needs and resources more effectively would be consistent with the outcome of the Third Biennial Meeting, which stressed the importance of sharing information on resources available for assisting States and enhancing efforts to better coordinate these efforts.

27. It is clear that these efforts would supplement existing effective regional and bilateral assistance and cooperation efforts rather than duplicate them.

28. While the Programme of Action implementation support system is one step to achieve this, the missing link in implementation appears to be the formulation of processes and documentation for requests for, and offers of, assistance. The Office for Disarmament Affairs is preparing a model project outline which States can use to outline their assistance needs and UNIDIR has created a comprehensive tool for self-assessment.

29. One approach States may wish to consider is for the outcome document of the Biennial Meeting to endorse the Office for Disarmament Affairs to assist, upon request, States to complete a project outline (using its draft template). In order to better identify donors for these proposals and to increase the visibility of available assistance, the Meeting could endorse an approach whereby the Office presents all of these requests (and any offers it receives) to regular informal meetings of interested States, international organizations and civil society in order to identify possible matches. The Office could also be mandated to engage in active identification of potential donors directly.

30. The outcome document of the Biennial Meeting could support consideration of further measures to facilitate strategic dialogue and follow-up on the question of assistance. In particular, the document could highlight the need to identify ways to address challenges, such as needs identification and the matching of needs and resources, as well as the effectiveness of assistance from recipient and donor perspectives. It could also stress the importance of the sharing of information on available resources.

31. In addition, the outcome document could highlight the need to build linkages across existing projects which achieve multiple objectives. For example, cooperation among border officials, such as joint patrols, results in improved effectiveness in implementing the Programme of Action but may also be useful to achieve other goals, including combating transnational crime and terrorism. The potential for this “multiplier effect” could be highlighted in the outcome document.

32. Although implicit in many discussions of Programme of Action implementation to date, international cooperation, as distinct from international assistance, has seldom received focused attention. Nevertheless, along with international assistance, it is fundamental to international efforts to achieve the full and effective implementation of the Programme of Action.

33. States could use discussion on this issue during the Fourth Biennial Meeting to take stock of progress made in implementing the Programme of Action in the area of international cooperation, including implementation challenges and opportunities; take stock of progress made in implementing the measures highlighted in the outcome document of the Third Biennial Meeting in the area of international cooperation; identify additional areas in which inter-agency cooperation is possible and desirable in addressing the illicit trade in small arms in all its aspects; identify additional areas in which information-sharing is possible and desirable in addressing the illicit trade in small arms in all its aspects; and consider whether and how existing mechanisms or structures for inter-agency cooperation and information-sharing could be adapted to international cooperation on small arms and light weapons.

34. In addition, in the area of the promotion of dialogue and a culture of peace, international cooperation could include, for example, exchanging national experiences in the implementation of effective education and public awareness programmes, strengthening partnerships with civil society in building peace at the local level, training police in the appropriate use of force and firearms, and exchanging views on the practical implications of the links between peace and security, and development, human rights and the rule of law.

35. As outlined above, the Third Biennial Meeting highlighted inter-agency cooperation and information-sharing as key areas for progress in the area of cooperation. The outcome document of the Fourth Meeting could usefully underscore the importance of increased cooperation, in particular on the regional and subregional levels, in order to achieve common goals. In this regard, the document could identify the different forms of cooperation which exist (that is, South-South, North-South and North-North frameworks).

36. The outcome document could also highlight the need for enhanced inter-agency coordination, on the national and international levels, by utilizing existing organizations and structures, such as the World Customs Organization and INTERPOL, in order to facilitate information exchange, facilitate the identification and prosecution of groups or individuals, assist in the prevention of illicit small arms brokering and support the implementation of the international tracing instrument. The document could specifically identify key personnel among whom coordination could be improved. They would include police, judicial, investigative and prosecuting authorities, customs and border officials, intelligence officials, and arms control officials responsible for arms transfer licensing, transit, brokering and transport.

37. Regarding information-sharing, the outcome document could highlight particular areas where information exchange could be enhanced. For example, the Programme of Action specifically highlights information exchange on confiscated or destroyed small arms, illicit trade routes and techniques of acquisition and national marking systems.
