

World Bank data has revealed that poverty is declining for much of the world, but countries affected by violence are lagging behind. The effects of violence are long lasting. “People in fragile and conflict-affected states are more likely to be impoverished, to miss out on schooling, and to lack access to basic health services. Children born in a fragile or conflict-affected state are twice as likely to be undernourished and nearly twice as likely to lack access to improved water; those of primary-school age are three times as likely not to be enrolled in school; and they are nearly twice as likely to die before their fifth birthday.”¹

Countries suffering from sustained levels of armed conflict or violence are also those furthest from reaching their Millennium Development Goal targets. The complex linkages among arms, violence, conflict and development continue to play out in States around the world, as demonstrated in recent reports to the Security Council on Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, South Sudan, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and elsewhere.” – UN Secretary General, Report on Small Arms and Light Weapons, 2015 (S/2015/289)

By adopting the United Nations Program of Action (PoA) in July 2001 all governments around the world jointly expressed their ‘grave concern’ that “the illicit manufacture, transfer and circulation of small arms and light weapons and their excessive accumulation and uncontrolled spread in many regions of the world... have a wide range of humanitarian and socio-economic consequences and pose a serious threat to peace, reconciliation, safety, security, stability and sustainable development at the individual, local, national, regional and international levels.”²

Fourteen years later, in September 2015,

1. The World Bank, World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security and Development, page 63.
2. Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (A/CONF.192/15) (2001) Preamble paragraph 2

all Member States committed themselves to ‘significantly reduce illicit arms flows’ under Agenda 2030 for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These contain 17 goals and 169 corresponding targets that must be achieved by 2030.³

How do illicit flows of SALW undermine sustainable development?

- An estimated 2 million people in non-conflict settings are estimated to be living with life-changing non-lethal injuries from firearms, affecting not just individuals but entire communities.⁴
- After a conflict ends, the average society takes more than 10 years to return to the level of human rights observance before the conflict.⁵
- The ten most lethal armed conflicts in 2016 were reported to be: Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia, Sudan, Turkey, South Sudan and Nigeria.⁶ But other countries with very high reported rates of lethal violence per 100,000 in 2014 were Honduras (75), El Salvador (64) Venezuela (62), Lesotho (38), Jamaica (36) and South Africa (33).⁷
- Conflict and violent crime is breeding ground for organized crime, trafficking in drugs and precious minerals, terrorism, corruption, bribery, theft and tax evasion that cost some US \$1.26 trillion for developing countries per year⁸
- Survivors of arms-related violence with physical

3. United Nations General Assembly, Sustainable Development Goals: 17 Goals to Transform our World, Resolution 70/1, available at <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/peace-justice/>

4. Anna Alvazzi del Frate, “A matter of survival: non-lethal firearm violence”, in Small Arms Survey 2012: Moving Targets (Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 79-105.

5. World Bank Report, op cit, page 64.

6. Armed Conflict Survey, produced by the London based International Institute for Strategic Studies

7. UN Office on Drugs and Crime’s International Homicide Statistics database. (<https://www.unodc.org/gsh/>) (<http://data.worldbank.org>) ([http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/H-Research Notes/SAS-Research-Note-60.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/H-Research%20Notes/SAS-Research-Note-60.pdf)); see also UN Office on Drugs and Crime, Global Study on Homicide, 2013, chapter 3, Homicide Mechanisms, <https://www.unodc.org/gsh/en/homicide-mechanisms.html>

8. UN Sustainable Development Goals, Peace Justice and Strong Institutions – why this matter, 2017 <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/peace-justice/>

and psychological impairments face higher barriers to effective employment, well-being, and reintegration into community and family life.⁹

- The proliferation of small arms tends to impact negatively on women's equality and bargaining power within the household, their mobility and their political participation, and can detrimentally affect women's access to, and use of, resources and business and employment opportunities.¹⁰
- The rate of children leaving primary school in conflict affected countries reached 50 per cent in 2011 and the UN Secretary-General noted other substantial impact of current conflicts on children, including in relation to their recruitment and use, sexual abuse and exploitation, killing and/or maiming and displacement, as well as the destruction of their schools and homes.¹¹

Particularly in contexts of armed conflict, the abuse of arms can lead to the damage, destruction and/or closure of civilian infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, places of work, markets, residential areas, buildings and areas of religious and cultural significance, as well as to a breakdown in basic services.¹² In turn, civilians, including internally displaced persons and refugees, can be deprived of the minimum essential levels of food, health, education, shelter and sanitation.

What can be done to prevent illicit flows of SALW undermining development?

In 2001 Member States were "concerned also by the implications that poverty and underdevelopment may have for the illicit trade..." and recalled the Millennium Declaration.¹³ Although the Millennium Declaration of 2000 emphasized human rights as well as peace, security and disarmament, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that emerged from the

Declaration contained no mention of any of these topics – nor of justice, the rule of law, conflict, or of freedom from fear or violence.

Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 16

The Biennial Meeting of States on the PoA in June 2016 welcomed the SDGs as a "defining moment for global efforts to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons".¹⁴ Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, represents a significant step towards recognizing the importance of robust arms control to allow sustainable development, and particularly target 16.4 which reads:

"By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime."

A reasonable assumption, given the PoA and other international instruments adopted by Member States, is that the terms "arms" and "flows" should be used without qualification: "arms" certainly includes SALW and the term "flows" includes the "transfer and circulation" of such items, as in the PoA i.e. between and within States. The term "illicit arms trafficking" was described in the UN Guidelines for International Arms Transfers as covering "that international trade in conventional arms, which is contrary to the laws of States and/or international law".¹⁵

As part of the implementation of SDG 16.4, the UN will be attempting to elaborate and agree indicators such as the "Proportion of seized, found or surrendered arms whose illicit origin or context has been traced or established by a competent authority in line with international instruments."¹⁶ Better tracking of seized, found, or surrendered weapons will highlight illicit trade patterns, as well as weaknesses in monitoring and control of the legal trade.

Other targets for SDG 16 closely related to 16.4 are, for example:

- 16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere
- 16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all

14. The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects, Report of the Secretary-General, Sixth Biennial Meeting of States (A/71/438–A/CONF.192/BMS/2016/1)

15. United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/51/42 of 1996, Annex 1, UN Disarmament Commission Guidelines for International Arms Transfers, paragraph. 7

16. United Nations Statistical Commission, Revised list of Global Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, March 2017, page 22

9. Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and Inter-Parliamentary Union, Missing Pieces: A Guide for Reducing Gun Violence through Parliamentary Action, 2007, p. 63.

10. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF); and South-Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, Gender and SALW in South East Europe: Main Concerns and Policy Response

11. Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (A/70/836-S/2016/360)

12. Contributions of Amnesty International and Control Arms (unpublished) to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights study on The impact of arms transfers on the enjoyment of human rights, 2017; for published reports, see for example, Amnesty International and IANSA, How an Arms Trade Treaty can help prevent Armed Violence, 2011 Index: ACT 30/030/2011; Amnesty International, Blood at the Crossroads: Making the Case for a global Arms Trade Treaty, September 2008, Index number: ACT 30/011/2008; Control Arms, Shattered Lives, the case for tough international arms control, Oxfam and Amnesty International, 2003.

13. PoA, op cit, paragraphs 3 and 19

- forms of violence against and torture of children
- 16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all
- Also see targets 16.5 (substantially reduce corruption and bribery), 16.6 (develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels) and 16.7 (Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels)

Implementing the PoA, the International Tracing Instrument and the UN Firearms Protocol

To help achieve SDG 16 the PoA is highly relevant as is the UN Firearms Protocol. The PoA commits Member States to have robust control and regulation of the manufacture, export, import, transit or retransfer of SALW to prevent their illicit manufacturing, trafficking and diversion.¹⁷

Member States are also requested to destroy surplus SALW and regulate the activities of brokers of SALW transactions. Moreover, under the PoA and reinforced by the International Tracing Instrument, Member States are supposed to ensure that licensed manufacturers apply appropriate and reliable marking on each small arm and light weapon as an integral part of the production process, which would enable national authorities of that Member State to identify the manufacturer and serial number so that the authorities concerned can identify and trace each weapon.¹⁸

The PoA is also reinforced through the legally binding but narrower provisions of the UN Firearms Protocol, which has 109 States Parties and is one of the three protocols to the Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime.¹⁹ The Protocol provides a framework for states parties to control and regulate legal arms and arms flows, prevent

their diversion into the illicit market, and facilitate the investigation and prosecution of related offences.

Regular and comprehensive reporting to implement and strengthen the PoA, and sustained international cooperation to apply the UN Protocol mechanisms can allow for regular and objective evaluation of the SDGs, especially Goal 16 itself. The Indicator for Target 16.4 can also be used by Member States to develop national and regional indicators required for measuring progress under the SDGs. However, much greater efforts need to be made by States, especially in Africa and Asia, to submit reliable data on armed violence and on the trafficking of SALW and their seizure, discovery and surrender.²⁰

The Review Conference of the PoA to be held in mid 2018, and the meetings leading up to it, should address these issues and the deeply cross-cutting nature of the links between illicit SALW flows and sustainable development, and should take into account that several national agencies may need to be involved in order to achieve SDG target 16.4

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17. PoA, op cit, Section II.2

18. PoA, op cit, Section II.7 Also, UN procedures for identifying the origin and chain of transfer of a particular SALW are set out in the International Tracing Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons, adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2005.

19. 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, 2001.

20. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Study on Firearms - A study on the transnational nature of and routes and modus operandi used in trafficking in firearms, 2015. Only 45 countries participated with the Study, and only 39 of those provided data on seizures of illicit firearms.