This Quick Guide provides an overview of key outcomes of the Third United Nations Review Conference on the Programme of Action to Reduce, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA). It includes suggested follow-up actions, primarily focused on analysts, activists, and diplomats.

This guide supplements other IANSA resources, including: “Summary of the Outcome of the Third Review Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspects,” by Brian Wood, “Small Arms, Big Harms: A Call to Action by Civil Society on Gender and Small Arms Control,” from the IANSAs Women’s Network; and “Six Key Issues for the 2018 Review Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons,” by Dr. Natalie Goldring.1

**Introduction**

The Review Conference in June 2018 (RevCon3) was the third for the PoA, which was originally adopted in 2001. Between review conferences, States convene Biennial Meetings of States (BMS); there have been six BMS so far. A BMS is generally designed for States to provide updates on the implementation of the PoA, while review conferences give States the opportunity to reach more substantial agreements to strengthen the PoA’s implementation.

From the beginning of the preparatory process for RevCon3, the conference President, Ambassador Jean-Claude Brunet of France, emphasized the continuing importance of consensus decision-making, as has been the case at previous meetings in the PoA process. In the past, this has meant that consensus in effect has equaled unanimity, with a single country often able to block progress. In 2018, however, States refused to allow this to happen. States called for votes on three paragraphs, two on ammunition and one on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The two key paragraphs on ammunition were approved overwhelmingly. The first paragraph received 63 votes in favor, 28 abstentions, and two “no” votes (from the United States and Israel). The second paragraph on ammunition received 62 votes in favor, with 29 abstentions; the United States and Israel voted against this paragraph as well. The paragraph on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by a vote of 65 to zero, with 25 abstentions. Although these paragraphs were opposed by a small number of States, in the end, they were included in the document because of the support of the overwhelming majority of States. The Outcome Document was ultimately adopted unanimously – including gaining the support of the States that had opposed individual paragraphs.

This guide uses the framework of the six key issues that IANSA identified as needing additional attention in the PoA process.2

- the illicit trade in ammunition;
- gender-based action to curb SALW proliferation and violence;
- destruction of surplus and excessive accumulations of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and ammunition;
- links among small arms and light weapons reduction, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.4, and development;
- measures to address armed violence, crime, and conflict; and
- synergies in implementing the PoA and the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT).

For each of these six issues, this Quick Guide gives a brief summary of what happened at the Conference and why the results are important, with some suggestions for next steps.

**Illicit Trade in Ammunition**

**What happened and why the results are important**

The Outcome Document includes two important paragraphs on ammunition. The first welcomes the newly created General Assembly process that focuses on developing ways to deal with the accumulation of surplus conventional ammunition.3 The second paragraph acknowledges the usefulness of States exchanging information in order to increase their ability to deal with SALW ammunition. It emphasizes that States may learn lessons from other

---

1 Resources available at [https://www.iansa.org/briefing-papers](https://www.iansa.org/briefing-papers)

2 See Dr. Natalie J. Goldring, *Six key issues for the 2018 Review Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons* for the analysis of these issues that IANSA published before RevCon3.

3 A/CONF.192/2018/RC/3, Declaration, paragraph 16: “We welcome the process established by General Assembly Resolution 72/55, adopted by consensus, with a view to identifying urgent issues pertaining to the accumulation of conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus on which progress can be made.”
instruments that are applicable to the implementation of the PoA.4

While some diplomats and civil society representatives were involved in efforts to reach consensus language on ammunition, they were unsuccessful. The US delegation called for a vote on both paragraphs, even opposing the reference to the ammunition process it had supported in the General Assembly. Ultimately, delegations overruled the US objections with an overwhelming majority vote favoring the inclusion of the two paragraphs.

The inclusion of language on ammunition is a significant step forward from a substantive perspective, because it represents recognition of the critical importance of dealing with SALW ammunition in the framework of the PoA.5 In a move with important substantive and process implications, proponents of a strong PoA successfully asserted themselves by insisting on including language on ammunition and by supporting strong text when attempts to reach consensus failed. That States ultimately voted unanimously in favor of the Outcome Document is also important from a process perspective, and sets a precedent for future meetings.

Next steps

Important next steps include encouraging governments to review their existing legislation, to exchange information with other countries, and to report publicly on ammunition exports, imports, and transit, both in their reports on the PoA and in implementing other instruments such as the Arms Trade Treaty.

Gender-Based Action to Curb SALW

What happened and why the results are important

Work on gender is one of the important successes of RevCon3. The Outcome Document contains remarkably strong commitments, including a overdue focus on gender-based violence. This continued the progress on gender issues that has been made in recent Biennial Meetings of States. For example, the Outcome Document encourages the collection of gender-disaggregated data on the illicit trade in SALW. It calls for States to work together to increase the extent to which gender dimensions are in the mainstream of programs to combat the illicit trade in SALW. It also has strong language on the importance of the full participation and representation of women.6

When the PoA was originally adopted in 2001, the word “gender” was so controversial that it was not even mentioned in the document. The extensive language on gender in the RevCon3 Outcome Document reflects extraordinary progress over the course of the PoA’s existence, and particularly in the past several years.

The language on gender-based violence in the Outcome Document is consistent with many recommendations from the IANSA Women’s Network and with the Call to Action on Gender and Small Arms Control,7 which has been favorably received by many States.

Next steps

Full implementation of the Outcome Document’s commitments on gender will require political will at all levels of society and sufficient funding to carry out the proposed activities. One low-cost, immediate improvement would be for governments to ensure the full and effective participation of women on their national small arms commissions and in their delegations to relevant conferences and meetings.

Destruction of Surplus and Excessive SALW and Ammunition

What happened and why the results are important

The Outcome Document contains strong language on destruction of surplus, confiscated, seized, and collected SALW.8 It discusses the importance of stockpile management, disposal of surplus weapons, and best practices to ensure that deactivation and destruction are irreversible. It also calls for international cooperation on how best to effectively implement these measures. Destruction of surplus, confiscated, seized, and collected SALW is an issue that IANSA has highlighted in many different fora over the years.

---

4 A/CONF.192/2018/RC/3, Section II, paragraph 18: “To acknowledge that States that apply provisions of the Programme of Action to small arms and light weapons ammunition can exchange and, as appropriate, apply relevant experiences, lessons learned and best practices acquired within the framework of the Programme of Action.”

5 For further information on ammunition control, see Brian Wood and Lawrence Robinson, “The Programme of Action on Small Arms: Incomplete without the Inclusion of Ammunition,” IANSA, June 2017, via https://www.iansa.org/briefing-papers

6 A/CONF.192/2018/RC/3, Section II, paragraph 80: “To encourage the full participation and representation of women, including in leadership roles, and acting as agents of change, in policymaking, planning and implementation processes related to the Programme of Action, such as national small arms commissions and programs relating to community safety, violence reduction, collection and destruction of small arms and light weapons and conflict prevention and resolution.”

7 This document was developed by the IANSA Women’s Network in consultation with civil society organizations, UN officials, and government officials. It was launched in June 2018 at the Third Review Conference of the Programme of Action. It can be found on the IANSA website at https://www.iansa.org/briefing-papers.

8 A/CONF.192/2018/RC/3, Section II, paragraph 45: “Subject to any legal constraints associated with the preparation of criminal prosecutions, to destroy confiscated, seized or collected small arms and light weapons that have been illegally manufactured, unless another form of disposition or use has been officially authorised, in which case such weapons have been duly identified, marked and recorded.”
Irreversible destruction is the best way to ensure that weapons are not reused; it gives certainty that weapons will not be reactivated and recirculated.9

Unfortunately, RevCon3 did little to directly address excessive and destabilizing accumulations of weapons and ammunition. This is a significant shortcoming of the Outcome Document.

“In my math class, I came face to face with the terrifying reality of gun violence. Crouching in the corner of my classroom, I can still hear the screams of the students and teachers from the floors above and below.”

– Mei-Ling Ho-Shing, 17-year old survivor of the Parkland, Florida school shooting in USA, in her civil society presentation at RevCon3

Next steps

Governments should work to ensure robust implementation of these provisions. For example, it is important to seek funding to ensure that confiscated, seized, and collected weapons are destroyed, not simply stored or returned to circulation. Analysts, activists, and governments should increase attention to the consequences of excessive and destabilizing accumulation of weapons, developing and implementing measures to prevent such accumulations.

Links Among SALW Reduction, SDG 16.4, and Development

What happened and why the results are important

The Outcome Document contains numerous references to links between the PoA and sustainable development, many of which specifically mention the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While only one paragraph contains a direct broader link to the SDGs, there also are other connections elsewhere in the Outcome Document. The most significant commitment is contained in paragraph 13 of the Declaration:

13. We also stress the importance of the full and effective implementation of the Programme of Action and the International Tracing Instrument to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Goal 16 and target 16.4, which calls for a significant reduction of illicit arms flows by 2030; and acknowledge that sustainable development cannot be realized without peace and security and that peace and security will be at risk without sustainable development, and note that the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons has implications for the realization of several Sustainable Development Goals, including those relating to peace, justice and strong institutions, poverty reduction, economic growth, health, gender equality, and safe cities and communities.

The Outcome Document’s substantive successes in this area include recognizing important and extensive links among SALW reduction, SDG target 16.4, and development. In particular, paragraph 13 of the Declaration in the Outcome Document (quoted above) directly acknowledges these links. This text is particularly useful for those who want to develop the connections to various aspects of achieving sustainable development, including exploring the links between the reduction of illicit arms flows and illicit financial flows, as contained in SDG target 16.4. These commitments were supported by the overwhelming majority of States despite the efforts of Syria, Iran, and others to weaken and constrain references to the SDGs.

The success in linking SALW reduction, SDG target 16.4, and sustainable development in the Outcome Document was also important from a process perspective. Governments supporting more extensive recognition of these links won out over those who sought to use the consensus process to secure agreement on weakened provisions. In the end, the government of Syria insisted on a vote on paragraph 13, but then abstained from the actual vote.

Next steps

Government and intergovernmental agencies should develop action plans and devote resources at the local, national, regional, and global levels to integrate work to eradicate the illicit trade in SALW with official development assistance. Analysts and advocates specializing in SALW issues also need to work more closely with organizations focusing on development work to develop and enhance synergies among their projects.

Measures to Address Armed Violence, Crime, and Conflict

What happened and why the results are important

The Outcome Document refers to crime and violence in several places. It recognizes that the illicit trade in SALW makes it more difficult to enforce international human rights law. It also discusses linkages between the illicit trade in SALW and trafficking in both people and goods and the importance of strengthening cooperation against transnational organized crime.10


10 For example, paragraph 4 of the Declaration states: “We emphasize that the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects continues to sustain conflicts, exacerbates armed violence, including crime, contributes to the displacement of civilians, undermines respect for international humanitarian law, and impedes the provision of humanitarian assistance to victims of armed conflicts.”
Addressing issues of crime and violence is extremely important, as the vast majority of deaths and injuries with SALW do not occur in situations of armed conflict. However, it is disappointing that the Outcome Document does not mention the need for States to join and implement the UN Firearms Protocol. It also fails to mention the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, which are intended to ensure that the use of firearms by State actors is consistent with international human rights standards.

“He shot me point blank, leaving me paraplegic for the rest of my life. I survived, but each year more than 100,000 Latin Americans do not.”

– Alex Galvez, Guatemalan IANSA member and Executive Director of Asociación Transiciones, in his civil society presentation at RevCon3

Next steps

Analysts and activists should work to convince governments to integrate efforts to combat the illicit trade in SALW across agencies and to join and implement the UN Firearms Protocol and UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms. In some countries, these issues are dealt with separately in military and police regulations and in criminal codes. In their national plans of action to counter armed crime and trafficking, governments should avoid duplication of effort and should ensure that essential information is shared among relevant agencies at the national, regional, and global levels.

Synergies in Implementing the Programme of Action and the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)

What happened and why the results are important

Unfortunately, governments and civil society were not successful in achieving explicit recognition in the Outcome Document of important links between the PoA and other international instruments. The Outcome Document does not refer directly to the ATT, the UN Firearms Protocol, or other relevant instruments, because of the resistance of a small group of States.

Nevertheless, the Outcome Document does refer to synergies among the PoA, the International Tracing Instrument, and target 16.4 of the Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Outcome Document also contains references to “other relevant instruments to which a state is a party,” to “legally binding instruments to which a State is a party,” and to “all other instruments to which a state is a party.” Taken together, these commitments provide the basis for work by like-minded States to take advantage of the synergies among the instruments relevant to combating the illicit trade of SALW in all its aspects.

Conclusion

One important challenge is generating sufficient political will in governments to move forward on these key issues. Another challenge is securing funding for States and civil society actors so that they can undertake or increase their efforts.

The commitments made by States in RevCon3 included significant progress on both substantive and procedural matters. The Outcome Document provides opportunities for further work on extremely important issues at national, regional, and global levels.

This briefing paper was prepared for IANSA by Dr. Natalie J. Goldring and updated in April 2019. Dr. Goldring is a Senior Fellow with the Security Studies Program in the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University and a Visiting Professor of the Practice at the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University. She also represents the Acronym Institute at the United Nations, primarily on conventional weapons and arms trade issues. She gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Brian Wood, Rose Welsch, Rebecca Peters, and Baffour Amoaa with this paper and related publications.


https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/bb4a5b_31e6ed9f3dd1d4e81c537ab4d0c69e5.pdf