



Concept Note

United Nations Security Council Arria-Formula Meeting on Small Arms Control and Weapons Management in UN Sanctions Regimes

Convened by: Sierra Leone

Co-Sponsors: Algeria, Guyana, and Somalia

4 April 2025, 10:00 AM
CONFERENCE ROOM 2, UNHQ

Background

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) poses a significant threat to international peace and security, particularly in conflict zones under United Nations (UN) sanctions. These weapons are primary drivers of hostilities, often used by illegal armed groups and terrorists, as well as transnational organized criminal groups and gangs to initiate and sustain conflicts. The easy availability of illicit SALW enables illegal armed groups and terrorists to escalate violence, undermining UN peacebuilding and stabilization efforts. The uncontrolled flow of weapons destabilizes entire regions, routinely violates UN arms embargoes, and exacerbates both conflict and humanitarian crises. Beyond immediate security concerns, the unchecked trafficking of SALW also leads to human rights violations and impedes development in conflict-affected countries.

UN Security Council sanctions regimes frequently employ arms embargoes to restrict the flow of weapons to conflict actors. Currently, fourteen (14) active UN sanctions regimes impose arms embargoes on conflict-affected states or non-state groups. However, enforcing these embargoes presents significant challenges. Compliance is often weak, with nearly every recent arms embargo being systematically violated. Illicit cross-border trafficking, porous borders, and illicit market networks enable weapons to reach embargoed entities despite prohibitions. This failure to halt arms flows undermines the credibility of Security Council measures and prolongs conflicts. Strengthening arms control within sanctions regimes, including by providing greater clarity on the management and disposal of seized items, is crucial to preventing armed groups from rearming and to creating space for peace processes, including disarmament and reintegration of ex-combatants.

The UN Security Council and the broader international community have long recognized the link between illicit weapons and conflict and have established frameworks to address this

issue. Resolution 2117 (2013), the Security Council's first thematic resolution on small arms, focused on the illicit transfer and excessive accumulation of SALW in conflict situations. This was followed by resolution 2220 (2015), which reinforced international cooperation on small arms control, encouraged the effective implementation of UN arms embargoes, and supported the implementation of instruments like the Arms Trade Treaty by states parties.

The UN Programme of Action on SALW (2001) and the International Tracing Instrument (2005) provide additional global frameworks to combat illicit arms trafficking. More recently, the Arms Trade Treaty (2014) has established binding standards to its states parties for responsible arms transfers to prevent diversion to conflict zones. Furthermore, the Security Council has endorsed regional initiatives, such as the African Union's "Silencing the Guns" initiative (resolution 2457, 2019), which emphasizes African-led efforts to end conflicts by curbing the flow of illicit weapons.

Objectives

The existing frameworks, including UN Security Council resolutions and tools, provide a foundation for a strategic discussion aimed at strengthening arms control measures within UN sanctions regimes. This meeting will focus on bridging the gap between internationally agreed normative frameworks and the realities on the ground in sanctions-monitored conflicts. Through open dialogue and knowledge-sharing, the meeting seeks to generate practical insights that contribute to more effective sanctions regimes and sustainable peace efforts globally.

Recognizing the destabilizing impact of uncontrolled arms flows, the UN Security Council has long emphasized the need for arms embargoes within relevant sanctions regimes. The Council has also established benchmarks to assess the implementation of arms embargoes and to assist conflict-affected states in managing SALW more effectively. However, the lack of harmonization of assessment tools and requirements across different regimes, particularly in similar conflict zones, poses challenges to international and subregional cooperation in strengthening enforcement mechanisms to combat SALW proliferation.

The key objectives of the meeting include:

1. **Strengthening Arms Embargoes on Non-State Actors:** Identifying practical ways to enhance the effectiveness of UN Security Council arms embargoes, improve compliance by Member States, and strengthen monitoring and enforcement

mechanisms. The meeting will also examine current benchmark assessment measures and explore opportunities to harmonize these measures across sanctions regimes.

2. **Assessing the Role of UN Sanctions in Addressing Small Arms Proliferation:** Examining how UN sanctions regimes contribute to curbing small arms proliferation and their impact on regional and global peace and security. The meeting will explore challenges and gaps in enforcing arms embargoes and monitoring illicit arms flows, while also identifying best practices and lessons learned from existing UN sanctions regimes. Actionable recommendations will be developed to enhance the effectiveness of sanctions in controlling small arms.
3. **Exploring Synergies in Small Arms Control:** Discussing how national, regional, and international efforts can work together to prevent the illicit proliferation of small arms, with a particular focus on the role of national commissions, such as Sierra Leone's Small Arms Commission.

The meeting will address the following critical issues:

1. **Tackling Illicit Cross-Border Trafficking:** Proposing strategies to prevent and disrupt illicit trafficking of SALW, particularly across porous borders in conflict regions. Discussions will focus on improving customs and border controls, enhancing information-sharing, and fostering regional cooperation to intercept illicit arms flows that support UN-sanctioned armed groups.
2. **The Link Between Conflict and Unregulated Arms Trade:** Exploring the nexus between armed conflict and the unregulated weapons trade, and how the proliferation of small arms perpetuates instability. Understanding these linkages will help inform more holistic conflict prevention approaches that incorporate arms control as a fundamental pillar of peace and security efforts (e.g., weapons tracing, stockpile management, and border security).
3. **Enhancing DDR and Weapons Management:** Examining ways to improve disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs for ex-combatants in conflict zones under UN sanctions, with an emphasis on weapons management. The meeting will focus on ensuring that UN sanctions regimes support robust DDR initiatives, from the safe collection and disposal of surrendered weapons to community reintegration, ensuring that demobilized fighters do not return to armed conflict. Strengthening DDR coordination within UN sanctions frameworks will support sustainable peace after former combatants ~~armed groups~~ disarm.

Guiding Questions

To focus the discussions and generate actionable outcomes, the following guiding questions are proposed:

1. **Strengthening the Enforcement of Embargoes:** How can the UN strengthen compliance and enforcement mechanisms for Security Council arms embargoes? What innovations, technologies, or best practices (e.g., improved monitoring, reporting, accountability, and harmonization of measures) could assist States and UN sanctions committees in detecting and preventing violations? What lessons can be drawn from past and ongoing benchmark assessments to improve small arms control and weapons management?
2. **Countering Illicit Arms Flows:** What are the key challenges in preventing illicit cross-border arms flows to armed groups in conflict areas under sanctions? How can neighboring states and international actors better cooperate to disrupt transnational trafficking networks and prevent weapons from reaching embargoed entities?
3. **Integrating DDR in Sanctions:** How can UN sanctions regimes better integrate DDR strategies to ensure that disarmament and weapons management accompany sanctions relief or conflict resolution efforts? How can the Security Council support DDR programs (through sanctions committees, peace operations, or reporting requirements) for a more durable transition from conflict to peace?
4. **The Role of Regional Organizations:** How can regional organizations, particularly the African Union through its “Silencing the Guns” initiative, and sub-regional bodies, support arms control in sanctioned countries? How can the UN and regional actors coordinate more effectively to share information, enforce embargoes, and build the capacity of affected states to combat illicit arms trafficking?

These questions aim to elicit concrete ideas and proposals, helping to identify gaps and opportunities in current UN sanctions practices related to small arms control.

Format and Participants

This Arria-formula meeting will be an open, informal discussion designed to encourage frank and constructive exchanges among UN Security Council members, UN member states, UN agencies, regional organizations, experts, and civil society representatives. The goal is to generate actionable outcomes to inform Security Council work on sanctions and arms control.

The meeting will be open to all Member States, in particular UN Security Council members. Participants are requested to limit interventions to three (3) minutes. Subject to availability, interpretation will be provided in the UN official languages. To inscribe to the list of speakers, please send email to sierraleone@pmun.net, copying slmissionun@yahoo.com no later than 17:00 2 April 2025 with the subject line: “Small Arms Control and Weapons Management in UN Sanctions Regimes”.

Briefers

1. **Mr. Adedeji Ebo**, Director and Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs
2. **Ms. Savannah de Tessieres**, UN Sanctions Committee Arms Expert
3. **Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas**, African Union High Representative for Silencing the Guns
4. **Mr. Callixtus Joseph**, Assistant Director for Policy, Innovation and Strategy, CARICOM IMPACS