



# Security Council

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## Small arms and light weapons

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [2220 \(2015\)](#), in which the Council requested me to continue to submit biennial reports on small arms and light weapons. The recommendations made in my previous reports on the subject ([S/2008/258](#), [S/2011/255](#), [S/2013/503](#), [S/2015/289](#) and [S/2017/1025](#)) remain relevant and valid.

The destabilizing accumulation, illicit transfer and misuse of small arms and light weapons continue to initiate, sustain and exacerbate armed conflict and pervasive crime. Small arms and light weapons remain a primary tool for armed conflict and violence, and the cross-cutting humanitarian impact of illicit flows remains a serious concern.

In May 2018, I launched a new disarmament agenda, *Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*. In that agenda, I prioritized “disarmament that saves lives”, including a call for deeper efforts with regard to small arms and light weapons at the national level. To this end, I have established a new trust facility, the Saving Lives Entity fund, to support country-level work in this area.

Considerable efforts have been undertaken over the past two years at the national, subregional, regional and global levels to strengthen the control of small arms and light weapons, such as the outcome of the third United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in 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. Nonetheless, further progress must be made.

With a view to supporting Security Council members in more consistently mainstreaming small arms and light weapons considerations across the Council’s work, both thematically and in country-specific contexts, the report provides an overview of relevant trends and developments, followed by a review of the most pertinent thematic agenda items relating to small arms and light weapons, namely the protection of civilians in armed conflict, peace operations, arms embargoes, women and peace and security, children and armed conflict, counter-terrorism, and transnational organized crime.



## I. Introduction

1. Since my previous report to the Security Council on this topic (S/2017/1025), global military expenditure has continued to advance, reaching the highest level since 1988.<sup>1</sup> Small arms and light weapons have continued to impede peace, security and sustainable development. Armed conflict, in which small arms and light weapons and associated ammunition play a fundamental role, has become more devastating for civilians, with disproportionate detrimental effects on children (see S/2019/373 and resolution 2225 (2015)). The highly gendered nature of small arms and light weapons has continued to have disproportionate impacts on women and girls, including in terms of sexual and gender-based violence.

2. Small arms and light weapons continue to be a primary cause of death in conflict and settings of pervasive crime. Activities by a multitude of actors, including terrorists, violent extremists and criminal elements, are further complicating peace and sustainable development efforts and aggravating ongoing conflicts. The danger of terrorist groups acquiring weapons remains ever present (see resolution 2405 (2018)).

3. In exercising its responsibility to maintain international peace and security, the Security Council has increasingly included in its considerations, in the context of country-specific and thematic agenda items, the role of small arms and light weapons in initiating and sustaining conflict (see S/2015/289, recommendation 1).

4. Throughout 2018, dimensions of the challenges posed by illicit transfers and the destabilizing accumulation and misuse of small arms, light weapons, ammunition and related materiel were considered in the framework of United Nations peace operations, including those in Afghanistan, Abyei, the Central African Republic, Haiti, Libya and Somalia (see resolutions 2405 (2018), 2445 (2018), 2448 (2018), 2410 (2018), 2441 (2018) and 2444 (2018), respectively). From weapons and ammunition management to marking and tracing, small arms and light weapons issues drew increased attention. Weapons-related issues formed part of the discussions on arms embargoes, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration activities, the organized crime-terrorism nexus and the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

5. The present report provides information on how small arms issues can be constructively and effectively mainstreamed into the work of the Security Council, giving an overview of trends and developments since my previous report. Subsequently, thematic agenda items are identified that are particularly pertinent to small arms and light weapons considerations. In section III, recommendations are made with a view to mainstreaming them into thematic agenda items, both conceptually and concretely.

## II. Trends and developments

6. In May 2018, I launched a disarmament agenda, *Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*.<sup>2</sup> Small arms and light weapons form a central component of the second pillar of that agenda: disarmament that saves lives. This priority is devoted to reducing and mitigating the humanitarian impact of conventional arms and addressing the excessive accumulation of and illicit trade in such weapons.

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<sup>1</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, available at [www.sipri.org/databases/milex](http://www.sipri.org/databases/milex).

<sup>2</sup> Available at [www.un.org/disarmament/sg-agenda/en/](http://www.un.org/disarmament/sg-agenda/en/).

7. In many places, small arms and light weapons are a key driver of human suffering. Their production, including craft manufacture, is a lucrative business and an attractive means of sustaining the activities of terrorist and criminal groups. Stockpiles of weapons and ammunition are increasing, including in areas affected by conflict. Against this backdrop, in the *Agenda for Disarmament*, I have committed the United Nations to taking specific actions to counter these destabilizing trends.

8. I have established a trust facility to support small arms control at the country level. This trust facility, the Saving Lives Entity fund, is a fundamental component of efforts to enhance disarmament that saves lives. Traditionally, the United Nations has sought to tackle the consequences of the widespread availability of illicit small arms and light weapons and ammunition from many angles, such as peace and security, gender equality, sustainable development, transnational crime, public health, children and youth, counter-terrorism and humanitarian action. This work has been at times fragmented and limited. The fund, which has been established through a partnership between the Peacebuilding Support Office, the United Nations Development Programme and the Office for Disarmament Affairs, will enhance the Organization's ability to more effectively support Governments in preventing armed violence through integrated, multi-year, cross-sectoral programmes and as part of wider development plans. The United Nations aims to pilot comprehensive in-country projects through the fund in 2020.

#### **A. Small arms and light weapons flows fuelling conflict, terrorism and crime**

9. The challenges posed by the illicit trade in and diversion of small arms and light weapons continue to exacerbate ongoing conflicts and contribute to the outbreak of others. Current crises, including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Mali and Ukraine, have been aggravated by the widespread availability and uncontrolled flow of weapons. Poor stockpile management, inadequate regulation and cross-border trafficking continue to plague already-fragile settings.

10. I am particularly concerned about the impact of illicit arms flows throughout the Sahel and parts of the Central African subregion. This situation stems largely from the flow of weapons from past and recent conflicts. Violent extremists, terrorists and organized crime groups are abetted and sustained by the widespread availability of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition.

11. A continued influx of weapons, including by sea, into Libya is a serious concern. Moreover, there has been massive diversion to countries across the Sahel and beyond of weapons originating from Libyan stockpiles. In August 2019, the Government of Chad announced that the country's borders with the Central African Republic, Libya and the Sudan had been closed, to restore order and end trafficking in arms.

12. I welcome the attention given by the Security Council to the situation in the Sahel, including its support for the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel (see [S/PV.8435](#)) and the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel developed in 2018. In addition to prioritizing cross-border cooperation, development and the empowerment of women and young people, it is essential that flows of small arms and their ammunition be urgently addressed.

13. South Sudan has similarly suffered from steady flows of illicit arms and ammunition. A steady resupply of weapons and ammunition has directly affected the safety of United Nations personnel and the ability of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan to carry out its mandate (see [S/2018/143](#)).

14. Haiti continues to suffer from pervasive armed violence facilitated by uncontrolled small arms and light weapons in broad circulation. With over 270,000 illicit firearms in the possession of civilians, compounded by illicit cross-border trafficking, crime has reached unacceptable heights. I welcome the adoption by the Security Council of resolution [2476 \(2019\)](#), by which it established the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti, with a mandate to provide advisory capacity on gang violence, community violence reduction and weapons and ammunition management.

## **B. Cross-cutting humanitarian consequences and human rights impact**

15. The humanitarian impact of the excessive accumulation and misuse of, and illicit trade in, small arms and light weapons is at the heart of the *Agenda for Disarmament*. Illicit small arms flows and misuse not only play a major role in the death toll from armed conflict, but also endanger peacekeepers and civilian personnel and impede the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Furthermore, the increasing scarcity of resources owing to climate change could increase the likelihood of conflict, which would then be further aggravated by the availability and misuse of small arms and light weapons.

16. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Sustainable Development Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, is indicative of a growing consensus that development is not possible without peace. Within the framework of Goal 16, States have committed themselves to a significant reduction in all forms of violence, related death rates and illicit arms flows, as well as strengthening relevant institutions for preventing violence and combating terrorism and crime.

17. As armed conflict increasingly moves away from open battlefields and into villages, towns and cities, the humanitarian impact is rising exponentially. More than 50 million people are affected by conflict in urban areas (see [S/2019/373](#)). Therefore, I have called for enhanced compliance with international law in the context of arms exports. Conventional arms exports, including small arms, light weapons and associated ammunition, must be contingent upon a robust risk assessment that incorporates the strictest considerations of international law. In this context, I welcome the adoption by the Human Rights Council in July 2019 of its resolution [41/20](#) on the impact of arms transfers on human rights. The Council acknowledged that millions of people around the world were affected by serious human rights violations and abuses resulting from or facilitated by the diversion of arms and unregulated or illicit arms transfers.

18. In most countries, small arms are the only weapons category that civilians are allowed to possess. Civilians own more than 850 million firearms worldwide, vastly outweighing the number estimated to be owned by the military and law enforcement sectors combined. In July 2018, the Human Rights Council recognized the direct risks posed by violence and insecurity related to civilian firearms to the rights to life, security of person and physical integrity, as well as to other economic, social and cultural rights, including the rights to health and education (see resolution [38/10](#)).

## **C. Gendered nature of small arms and light weapons**

19. The specific, deeply societal characteristics of the small arms issue necessitate a comprehensive mainstreaming of gender perspectives. To date, gender has not been sufficiently integrated into policies regulating small arms and light weapons. When

gender dimensions are not adequately taken into account in legislative and policy frameworks, the success and effectiveness of interventions are limited.

20. Armed conflict and armed violence affect women, men, girls and boys differently. Both women and men often have diverse roles in conflict and post-conflict environments and in settings of pervasive crime. Data on homicides confirm that the majority of victims of firearm-related homicide are men.<sup>3</sup>

21. For women, guns and violence between intimate partners often form a deadly combination. Data from a limited number of countries, specific to homicide perpetrated by an intimate partner or family member, suggest that such homicide is more likely to be perpetrated with a firearm when the victim is female.<sup>4</sup> Sexual and gender-based violence is abetted by armed intimidation. In both conflict and crime settings, when male family members are injured or killed, women often bear a heavy burden, including considerable psychological and economic consequences.

22. In order to be effective, policies need to both assess and include gender dimensions, as well as integrate the roles that women and men play in relation to arms. For example, grass-roots women's organizations are often on the front lines of advocating against the uncontrolled spread of small arms. At the same time, women and girls, through either force or choice, are sometimes used to smuggle arms because, as a result of both traditional stereotypes and insufficient numbers of women in security forces, they are unlikely to face the same rigorous security screenings as men.

23. Gendered approaches to small arms measures are still largely in their infancy, including the collection of data disaggregated by sex and age. Without the benefit of evidence-based information on the different attitudes that men and women have towards small arms and light weapons, and the risks presented, small arms control interventions will remain gender-blind, hampering policy development and impeding the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Good practices have been developed in the Western Balkans, for example, on data collection.

24. Gender-responsive small arms control policies, programmes and actions result in more effective outcomes and, consequently, support the broader objectives of gender equality, peace, security and development. Increased attention has been paid to gender under the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, in reference to both the need to strengthen the participation of women and the substantive consideration of gender with a view to making small arms and light weapons control more effective. At the third United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in 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, held in June 2018, States agreed on progressive gender-related language. They considered the specific impacts of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons on women, men, girls and boys (see [A/CONF.192/2018/RC/3](#)). For the first time, States explicitly acknowledged the relationship between the implementation of the Programme of Action and combating gender-based violence.

25. Similarly, gender-related considerations have been integrated into discussions in the framework of the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition (Firearms Protocol), supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Organized Crime Convention). At the ninth session of the Conference of the Parties, held in October 2018, States parties recognized the negative impact of illicit

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Global Study on Homicide 2019* (Vienna, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

trafficking in firearms on the lives of women, men, girls and boys. The Conference invited States parties to collect gender-disaggregated data on illicit trafficking, including through national reporting, and to increase understanding of gender-specific impacts with a view to mainstreaming gender perspectives into firearms policies and programmes.<sup>5</sup>

26. At the Fifth Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty, detailed discussions were held on gender and gender-based violence, the priority theme identified for the Conference. States parties adopted a package of recommendations and decisions in support of the operationalization of article 7 (4) of the Treaty, in which the risk of gender-based violence must be considered as part of export risk assessments.<sup>6</sup> With a view to enhancing understanding of the gendered impact of armed violence in the context of the Treaty, the Conference encouraged States parties to collect sex-disaggregated data within national crime and health statistics and to make such data publicly available.

27. While the proportion of women participating in arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament diplomacy has grown steadily over the past four decades, women remain underrepresented.<sup>7</sup> Effective security policies that respond to the needs of all necessitate greater gender balance.

#### **D. Global efforts to strengthen small arms and light weapons control**

28. At the global level, States, international and regional organizations and civil society have continued to engage in a range of initiatives in support of enhanced small arms control. In existing treaty frameworks, in the Programme of Action and in the context of peace operations, there has been demonstrable support for concretizing efforts to combat the illicit trade. While small arms issues remain highly contextualized in country and community contexts, coordination and information exchange at the global level remain crucial.

29. At the policy level, States continued to recognize the paramount importance of the Programme of Action as the universal framework for small arms and light weapons control under the auspices of the United Nations. Following the conclusion of the third Review Conference and rooted in the call in the *Agenda for Disarmament* for deeper actions at the country level, States initiated informal discussions on how to enhance the measurable national implementation of the Programme of Action. They began to consider, for example, voluntary national targets on small arms control. I welcome further consideration by States of this approach, in particular ahead of the upcoming Seventh 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, to be held in 2020, and on the basis of the recommendations contained in my report to the General Assembly on this topic (A/74/187).

30. In 2018, the Conference of the Parties to the Organized Crime Convention established a mechanism to review the implementation of the Convention and the Protocols thereto, including the Firearms Protocol. The peer-to-peer mechanism encourages States parties under review to prepare their responses through broad consultations at the national level with all relevant stakeholders, including individuals and groups outside the public sector, such as the private sector, non-governmental

<sup>5</sup> See CTOC/COP/2018/13, resolution 9/2.

<sup>6</sup> See ATT/CSP5/2019/SEC/536/Conf.FinRep.Rev1.

<sup>7</sup> Renata Hessmann Dalaqua, Kjølvi Egeland and Torbjørn Graff Hugo, "Still behind the curve: gender balance in arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament diplomacy", 2019. See [www.unidir.org/files/publications/pdfs/still-behind-the-curve-en-770.pdf](http://www.unidir.org/files/publications/pdfs/still-behind-the-curve-en-770.pdf).

organizations and academic institutions. This expert dialogue and its results have the potential to support the Security Council in identifying, highlighting and addressing challenges and good practices, including in conflict and post-conflict settings.

31. As identified in my previous report, weapons and ammunition management, in particular activities related to small arms and light weapons, have continued to play a key role in peace operations and in activities of the Security Council to address conflict-affected situations and the activities of armed groups. Over the past two years, the United Nations supported national authorities in weapons and ammunition management in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali (see resolutions [2448 \(2018\)](#), [2463 \(2019\)](#) and [2480 \(2019\)](#), respectively). In this regard, national capacity-building programmes supported Governments in security sector reform activities, including police and defence reform. Weapons and ammunition management also played a role in support of activities relating to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and the reduction of community violence.

32. The establishment of a dedicated unit within the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti to advise on issues of gang violence, community violence reduction and weapons and ammunition management is also illustrative of this trend (see resolution [2467 \(2019\)](#)). The United Nations, through the Office of my Special Representative for Haiti, is providing technical support to the Haitian national authorities to develop tailored policies and activities on weapons and ammunition management and the reduction of community violence.

33. In the framework of the General Assembly, States underlined the importance of the Programme of Action and the International Tracing Instrument in attaining Goal 16, including target 16.4 (see [A/CONF.192/2018/RC/3](#)). States have agreed to take advantage of the national reports submitted in this framework to support data collection for relevant indicators of the Goals. In 2018, 120 States submitted national reports, 72 reporting that, in total, 240,090 small arms and light weapons were collected by national authorities.<sup>8</sup> States also reported that, in total, 357,152 surplus weapons were destroyed in 2017.

34. To support data collection, and in the framework of the Organized Crime Convention and its Firearms Protocol, Member States were invited to provide quantitative and qualitative data on illicit trafficking in firearms through a questionnaire on illicit arms flows developed by the United Nations. The questionnaire is aimed at both collecting data required for reporting under indicator 16.4.2 of the Goals and generating data to support the identification and analysis of firearms trafficking flows, trends and patterns.<sup>9</sup>

35. Central to the attainment and monitoring of target 16.4 is the process of weapons tracing, which is aimed at identifying the illicit origin or point of diversion of trafficked arms. According to data submitted through the questionnaire from 18 countries, more than 90 per cent of firearms reported seized over the period from 2016 to 2017 had unique markings. However, preliminary data for the same period indicate that the success rate in tracing seized weapons was typically less than 13 per cent. Further progress is therefore required, including through well-maintained recordkeeping systems, standard operating procedures for tracing and capacities for arms identification, as well as effective procedures to foster international cooperation and the exchange of information.

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<sup>8</sup> Available at [www.smallarms.un-arm.org/statistics](http://www.smallarms.un-arm.org/statistics) and [www.smallarms.un-arm.org/sustainable-development-goals](http://www.smallarms.un-arm.org/sustainable-development-goals).

<sup>9</sup> Available at [www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/statistics/crime/iafq.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/statistics/crime/iafq.html).

36. Effective strategies against armed violence and terror attacks perpetrated with small arms and light weapons require enhanced international cooperation. To this end, the Illicit Arms Records and Tracing Management System of the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) presents more than 1,422,000 searchable records of illicit firearms reported as stolen, lost, trafficked or smuggled. The INTERPOL Ballistic Information Network is also a key part of these coordination efforts, as it allows for efficient comparison of ballistic data, generating new investigative leads. Membership of the Network currently stands at 35 countries, and there are over 1.2 million records that can be searched by all members. Coordination between law enforcement, intelligence and forensic agencies and the use of such tools are systematized in the INTERPOL firearms recovery protocol, which provides a standardized and harmonized procedure to be followed during investigations with regard to trafficking in firearms and firearms-related crimes.

37. Discussions in the Group of Governmental Experts on the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms have continued to make progress regarding small arms and light weapons. In 2019, the Group decided to recommend that Member States continue the seven-plus-one formula whereby they can report international transfers of small arms and light weapons in parallel with reporting on the seven categories of conventional weapons (see [A/74/211](#)).

## **E. Regional and subregional initiatives to strengthen small arms and light weapons control**

38. Efforts have continued to reinforce and enhance coordination in the area of small arms and light weapons control at the regional and subregional levels, with regional efforts especially critical with regard to combating cross-border trafficking. In particular, efforts in Africa have continued in the framework of the Silencing the Guns by 2020 initiative under the Agenda 2063 of the African Union. The Security Council, in its resolution [2457 \(2019\)](#), outlined means to ensure robust support for the initiative. I welcome the entry into force in March 2018 of the Central African Convention for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and All Parts and Components That Can Be Used for Their Manufacture, Repair and Assembly. The United Nations is supporting the implementation of the Convention through the provision of legal assistance and support for the development of an implementation guide.

39. I laud the efforts of the African Union Commission in promoting greater transparency and a stronger commitment among its member States to using evidence-based approaches to control the illicit proliferation and circulation of, and trafficking in, small arms and light weapons. A comprehensive understanding of the problem is a critical first step to taking effective action and achieving measurable outcomes.<sup>10</sup> I welcome the efforts of African States to control small arms and light weapons at the regional and subregional levels, specifically the development of subregional action plans and corresponding targets and indicators to monitor progress.

40. Consistent with the *Agenda for Disarmament*, the United Nations will continue to support State and regional action to address excessive and poorly maintained stockpiles in the framework of the Silencing the Guns by 2020 initiative, including by supporting activities relating to the Africa Amnesty Month for the surrender, collection and destruction of illegally held small arms and light weapons. Several activities have been implemented to enhance the management of government-owned stockpiles of weapons and ammunition through the provision of legal and technical

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<sup>10</sup> Nicolas Florquin, Sigrid Lipott and Francis Wairagu, *Weapons Compass: Mapping Illicit Small Arms Flows in Africa* (Geneva, Small Arms Survey and African Union Commission, 2019).



assistance, as well as to promote the marking of weapons of defence and security forces and those in civilian hands. The United Nations will continue to build on these successes, including the promotion and application of guidance on small arms and light weapons and ammunition, namely the Modular Small-arms-control Implementation Compendium<sup>11</sup> and the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines.<sup>12</sup>

41. In 2018, a road map for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition in the Western Balkans by 2024 was launched and endorsed by Governments of the region. If effectively implemented, it will result in a significant reduction in illicit small arms flows and illicit arms in possession throughout the region by 2024. On the basis of the provisions contained in instruments such as the Programme of Action, the Firearms Protocol and the Arms Trade Treaty, the road map addresses critical areas such as legislation, policy, criminal justice response to trafficking in firearms, education, collection, physical destruction and stockpile management. Corresponding timelines and monitoring indicators are included. Through the road map, States commit themselves to adapting their legal frameworks, building the corresponding national implementation capacities and taking action on existing surplus stockpiles of arms and ammunition. Given the cross-border nature of illicit arms trafficking, a framework for strengthening regional cooperation and international assistance is set up under the road map. The need for the full and effective participation of women in all related efforts is also acknowledged. This regional initiative is a welcome development, in particular in terms of its emphasis on specific targets and timelines, which could serve as a model for approaches in other regions.

### **III. Mainstreaming small arms and light weapons considerations throughout the Security Council agenda**

42. The present section contains several thematic areas of work of the Security Council that have particular relevance to small arms and light weapons considerations. It provides specific recommendations for ensuring that matters pertaining to small arms and light weapons and ammunition are effectively mainstreamed.

#### **A. Protection of civilians<sup>13</sup>**

43. The year 2019 marks 20 years since the Security Council first included the protection of civilians as an item on its agenda. However, the situation has, regrettably, changed little (see [S/2019/373](#)). More must be done to shield civilians from the devastation of armed conflict, of which they are now the main victims. While conflict prevention remains the foremost goal, ensuring the full and effective implementation of international humanitarian law and mitigating the humanitarian impact of conventional arms, including small arms and light weapons, is central to ensuring that civilians do not bear the brunt of armed conflict.

44. In September 2018, the Security Council recognized the contribution of the updated aide-memoire for the consideration of issues pertaining to the protection of civilians in armed conflict.<sup>14</sup> It also recognized the contribution of the aide-memoire

<sup>11</sup> See [www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/mosaic](http://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/mosaic).

<sup>12</sup> See [www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/ammunition](http://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/ammunition).

<sup>13</sup> See [S/2013/503](#), recommendation 4.

<sup>14</sup> Available at <https://poc-aide-memoire.unocha.org/>.

as a practical tool that provided a basis for improved analysis and diagnosis of key protection issues.<sup>15</sup> **I encourage States to fully utilize the aide-memoire with a view to ensuring that the role of small arms and light weapons in fuelling conflict and the perpetration of violence against civilians is fully taken into account and that the Council takes appropriate action.**

45. **The Security Council should continue to support United Nations efforts in weapons and ammunition management, including national-level capacity-building, to reduce risks to civilians. The management of small arms and light weapons and associated ammunition is particularly critical in that regard. The Strategy of the United Nations on Mine Action 2019–2023, as well as applicable standards such as the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines and the Modular Small-arms-control Implementation Compendium, should always be drawn upon to implement weapons and ammunition management through gender-sensitive, age-sensitive and disability-sensitive approaches.**<sup>16</sup>

## B. Peace operations<sup>17</sup>

46. United Nations peacekeepers are facing new challenges in environments characterized by a growing number of armed actors and a prevalence of weapons, ammunition and other explosives. In an independent report entitled “Improving the security of United Nations peacekeepers”, published in December 2017, it was stressed that high-risk security environments were seriously threatening peace operations, with casualties among peacekeepers increasing.<sup>18</sup> Specialized predeployment training, including in the area of weapons and ammunition management, is key to supporting peacekeepers in such difficult circumstances.

47. At present, the United Nations is actively supporting national authorities in countering the proliferation of and trafficking in small arms and light weapons by assisting them in the area of weapons and ammunition management. This support is being provided in several peace operation contexts, including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia.

48. The control of small arms and light weapons is a central element of addressing conflict-affected situations. For example, in the context of Mali, the Security Council underscored the importance of threat mitigation regarding small arms and light weapons to the security and stability of the State (see resolution [2480 \(2019\)](#)). It called upon the Malian authorities to address the proliferation of and illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons by ensuring the safe and secure management of stockpiles.

49. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali has been mandated to assist the national authorities in weapons and ammunition management (see resolution [2423 \(2018\)](#)). During the reporting period, more than 230 personnel from the Malian defence and security forces were trained in weapons and ammunition management and some 20 safe storage facilities were built. Since the start of the accelerated disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and integration process in November 2018, 1,750 weapons from armed movements in Gao, Kidal and

<sup>15</sup> United Nations, “Security Council presidential statement expresses outrage at continuing heavy casualty toll on civilians in situations of armed conflict”, press release, 21 September 2018.

<sup>16</sup> United Nations, “The United Nations Mine Action Strategy 2019–2023”, 4 December 2018 (see intermediate outcome 3: safety, security and disposal of weapons and ammunition stockpiles are enhanced).

<sup>17</sup> See [S/2015/289](#), recommendation 7, and [S/2013/503](#), recommendations 6 and 13.

<sup>18</sup> See [www.peacekeeping.un.org/en/improving-security-of-united-nations-peacekeepers-independent-report](http://www.peacekeeping.un.org/en/improving-security-of-united-nations-peacekeepers-independent-report).

Timbuktu have been registered. As part of its technical support for the Malian authorities and the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team pursuant to resolutions 1526 (2004) and 2253 (2015), the Mission also monitors materiel used in armed attacks against its personnel and installations. This has resulted in the identification of illicitly trafficked arms and ammunition. Such information is shared with the Malian authorities and the Monitoring Team.

50. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic was requested to provide technical assistance to the national authorities in the operationalization of a national commission on small arms and light weapons to address civilian disarmament and the fight against illicit proliferation (see resolution 2448 (2018)). Accordingly, it supported the development of a national strategy and national action plan on small arms and light weapons, which were adopted in 2019 and complemented by national capacity-building in safe and secure weapons and ammunition management.

51. In 2018, the United Nations produced an aide-memoire on options for reflecting weapons and ammunition management in decisions of the Security Council. It is noted in the aide-memoire that most arms-related language used in Council resolutions has historically concerned small arms and light weapons. It addresses weapons and ammunition management, inter alia, in the context of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, counter-terrorism and peace operations support for national activities.<sup>19</sup>

**52. When formulating mandates for peace operations, the Security Council is encouraged to make use of the aide-memoire with a view to providing language that ensures the effective implementation of activities related to the management of weapons and associated ammunition, in particular small arms and light weapons. Such language should address, to the greatest extent possible, specific actors, types of arms and ammunition to be managed, activities requested, time frames and resourcing.**

### C. Arms embargoes<sup>20</sup>

53. The relationship between the effective management of weapons and ammunition by a Government and Security Council efforts to modify or lift arms embargoes is an area worthy of further consideration. There are currently 14 sanctions regimes, 11 of which include an arms embargo, and 4 of which are imposed on non-State entities.<sup>21</sup> Overall, panels of experts indicate the continued availability of arms to armed groups in countries under arms embargoes, pointing to the fact that such embargoes are being circumvented in various ways, including through the diversion of national stockpiles. This further emphasizes the need to improve national and regional implementation and enforcement of arms embargoes, as well as weapons and ammunition management standards and guidelines. **The Security Council has increasingly employed small arms control as part of arms embargoes to safeguard against proliferation and diversion concerns. This is a good practice that I recommend that the Security Council continue and intensify.**

<sup>19</sup> United Nations, Office for Disarmament Affairs, *Aide-Memoire: Options for Reflecting Weapons and Ammunition Management in Decisions of the Security Council* (New York, 2018).

<sup>20</sup> See S/2008/258, recommendation 5.

<sup>21</sup> Sanctions regimes including an arms embargo apply to the Central African Republic, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, South Sudan, the Sudan, Yemen, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and the Taliban.

54. Ammunition is explicitly referenced in the following seven arms embargo contexts: Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya, Somalia, South Sudan, Yemen and the Taliban. It appears that the frequency of such references is increasing, which is a welcome trend. **When formulating arms embargoes, Security Council members are, to the greatest extent possible, urged to use consistent language across sanctions regimes and be as specific as possible.**

55. As there is no consistent methodology for assessing the effectiveness of arms embargoes, it is important that the Security Council approach any modification of such an embargo in an evidence-based manner.

56. The Security Council, in its resolution [2444 \(2018\)](#), requested me to conduct a technical assessment regarding the arms embargo on Somalia, with options and recommendations for improving implementation. In my assessment, while recognizing the progress made, I highlighted the challenges in the area of weapons and ammunition management, in particular in relation to coordination and capacity-building, which require further action by the Federal Government of Somalia, as well as the provision of international assistance to the Federal Government (see [S/2019/616](#)).

57. In its resolution [2454 \(2019\)](#), the Security Council requested me to assess the progress achieved on the key benchmarks that it established on arms embargo measures in the Central African Republic, including on weapons and ammunition management, and expressed its intention to review the measures in the light of that assessment. In my assessment, I noted that the Government and its partners had demonstrated commitments to achieving the necessary progress against the benchmarks. I also noted that they should be encouraged to continue their efforts, although the needs of the Government were significant and considerable challenges remained (see [S/2019/609](#)). In the same resolution, the Council also requested the authorities of the Central African Republic to report on progress achieved in the management of weapons and ammunition. **Building on this good practice, whenever relevant, the Security Council is encouraged to continue to include the efficient management of small arms and light weapons and associated ammunition at the national level as part of its considerations for lifting or modifying arms embargoes.**

#### **D. Women and peace and security<sup>22</sup>**

58. The need to better integrate small arms and light weapons considerations into the women and peace and security agenda remains a priority. Cross-referencing small arms and light weapons issues in resolutions and discussions on women and peace and security, including in the context of the work of the Security Council on sexual violence in conflict, is an important starting point for further convergence. A useful example is Council resolution [2242 \(2015\)](#), in which the Council acknowledged the specific impact of conflict and post-conflict environments on the security of women and girls and the risk of women becoming active players in the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. This acknowledgement addresses the close relationship between the widespread availability and circulation of illicit small arms and light weapons to the risk of sexual and gender-based violence, including in emergency and humanitarian situations.

59. In view of the main pillars of the women and peace and security agenda, it is important that emphasis be placed not only on protection, but also on participation, prevention, relief and recovery. The women and peace and security agenda should

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<sup>22</sup> See [S/2013/503](#), recommendation 4.

address small arms and light weapons comprehensively. Linkages should be drawn between successful and sustainable small arms control policies and the increased participation of women at all levels of decision-making. With regard to prevention efforts, the Security Council should consider how women can be actively engaged in efforts to prevent the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, including through the work of national commissions. Understanding of arms flows and associated challenges, as well as the gendered impacts of small arms and light weapons, should inform the design of adequate responses in the women and peace and security framework, including in peacebuilding settings. The advancement of relief and recovery efforts should be approached with a gendered lens, including by integrating the needs of women and girls into the design of policies, programmes and activities addressing the issue of small arms and light weapons.

60. Given the underrepresentation of women in the field of small arms and light weapons control, the inclusion and, where needed, the capacity-building of women should be encouraged. The synchronization of national action plans on small arms and light weapons with those on women and peace and security, as well as the exchange of information between national focal points working on those issues, may be a suitable vehicle to further strengthen convergence.

**61. The Security Council should consider how its thematic agenda item on small arms can be better converged with and mainstreamed into the women and peace and security agenda, in particular in the lead-up to the twentieth anniversary, in 2020, of the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000). For example, States may consider how small arms control can be included in their respective national action plans on that resolution. The Council is encouraged to address in its resolutions on women and peace and security how small arms and light weapons facilitate acts of sexual and gender-based violence and how they may impede the political participation of women in the political process.**

62. The lack of data, disaggregated by gender and age, in the field of small arms often hampers the development of effective initiatives, since it is not possible to address the differing impacts, uses and misuses of small arms by men, women, girls and boys. **I encourage the Security Council to support the collection of data on small arms and light weapons, disaggregated by sex and age, when including mandates on small arms and light weapons control in its decisions. Member States should also support civil society organizations, especially women's organizations, with sustainable funding to undertake work on the control of small arms and light weapons, including data collection activities.**

## **E. Children and armed conflict**

63. The detrimental effects of the illicit transfer, destabilizing accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition in situations of armed conflict continue to disproportionately affect millions of children globally by intensifying or prolonging conflicts. Small arms and light weapons contribute to the commission of grave violations against children in armed conflict, such as their recruitment and use, as well as killing, maiming, rape and sexual violence. In addressing the consequences of conflict, it is important to ensure that the needs of children are taken into account at all stages of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, including through the development of gender-sensitive and age-sensitive programmes. In particular, reintegration programmes for children affected by armed conflict have to ensure that the specific needs of girls and boys, including children with disabilities, are addressed, in terms of access to health care, psychosocial support, education programmes and other areas.

64. The United Nations and its Member States have remained seized of this issue and have supported the work of my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. Her monitoring and reporting of violations and her engagement with parties to end and prevent such violations is an essential mechanism to address the issue and mainstream the protection of children into the work of the United Nations. The Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict of the Security Council offers a key forum for identifying specific recommendations for action by the international community at large and specific States affected by conflict. While conclusions of the Working Group specifically addressing the issue of small arms and light weapons have yet to be issued, the Council is paying increased attention to weapons that result in the killing and maiming of children (see [A/73/907-S/2019/509](#)).

**65. The Security Council is encouraged to address how the excessive accumulation and misuse of, and illicit trade in, small arms and light weapons facilitate grave violations against children and incorporate this relationship into relevant resolutions and into discussions of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. In reviewing reports of the monitoring and reporting mechanism, the Working Group could consider how the availability and misuse of small arms and light weapons contribute to violations against girls and boys and offer recommendations in this regard to parties to conflict, Member States, the United Nations and other relevant actors. The Council may also consider requesting my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict to focus attention and research on the role of small arms and light weapons in facilitating grave violations against children.**

## **F. Countering terrorism**

66. Eliminating terrorist access to weapons, including small arms and light weapons, has become more complex and challenging. The similarities observed in terms of techniques, tactics and procedures between terrorist organizations operating in different countries demonstrate a capacity for regional transfer of know-how between terrorist groups. The Internet is also increasingly used for trade in weapons between unauthorized users, including terrorist groups. The dark web is especially attractive owing to the anonymity that it provides. In response to that threat, the Security Council has recognized the need for Member States to take appropriate measures to address the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons, in particular to terrorists, including by enhancing national systems for the collection and analysis of detailed data and by putting in place adequate laws, regulations and administrative procedures to exercise effective control (see resolution [2370 \(2017\)](#)).

67. Illegal cross-border flows, diversion from poorly controlled stockpiles and illicit production all support the acquisition of small arms, light weapons and related ammunition by terrorists (see resolutions [2370 \(2017\)](#) and [2483 \(2019\)](#)). In the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the connection between terrorism and illicit trafficking in small arms, light weapons, conventional ammunitions and explosives is highlighted (see General Assembly resolution [60/288](#)). In the sixth review of the Strategy, the Assembly called upon Member States to eliminate the supply of weapons, including small arms and light weapons, to terrorists (see resolution [72/284](#)).

68. In line with Security Council resolutions [2370 \(2017\)](#) and [2482 \(2019\)](#), efforts must be undertaken by all Member States to address these sources of supply, including through better information-sharing and coordination, national controls and legislation, investigations into the illicit origin of weapons, and enhanced weapons and ammunition management. The United Nations strives for improved information-sharing on possible arms embargo violations between groups of experts, peace

operations and other relevant United Nations entities. Arms embargoes mandated by the Council are an important means of support for eliminating the supply of small arms and light weapons to terrorists and should therefore be utilized as effectively as possible.

69. Proper and permanent deactivation of decommissioned firearms has emerged as especially critical in view of recent incidents, including the use of previously deactivated weapons in the devastating terror attacks in Paris in November 2015. I welcome the discussions on this issue in various forums, including the third Review Conference of the Programme of Action and the ninth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Organized Crime Convention, and the commitment of States to sharing good practices, tools and existing standards. In this context, I also recall the general principles of deactivation, as set out in article 9 of the Firearms Protocol.

70. The full and effective implementation of the International Tracing Instrument and the Firearms Protocol is important in efforts to combat the acquisition of small arms and light weapons by all unauthorized recipients, including terrorist groups. The Instrument guides national actions to ensure the traceability of weapons, thus supporting the identification and elimination of illicit trafficking routes and sources of diversion. The Firearms Protocol and its parent Convention provide the normative framework and investigative tools for enhanced criminal justice responses to the illicit acquisition of and trafficking in firearms in the context of terrorism and organized crime.

71. Certain weapons design and production methods have emerged that could have consequences for international efforts to address the illicit trade in small arms, in particular in relation to weapons marking, tracing and recordkeeping. Non-traditional materials, such as polymers, and modularity in weapon design have the potential to alter the way in which weapons are marked and traced, as well as how records are kept. The proliferation of craft production outside national legislation also presents risks. Taking into account these trends, **the Security Council is encouraged to consider threats emanating from craft production and other developments in the design and manufacture of small arms and light weapons, including the reactivation and conversion of blank-firing weapons and the increasing use of polymer materials, modular design and three-dimensional printing, as well as the use of the dark web.**

## G. Transnational organized crime

72. The international community has increasingly acknowledged the destabilizing impact of illicitly acquired or trafficked small arms and light weapons as a matter of particular concern in the context of organized crime. Although it occurs in different local variations, such trafficking is often a common ingredient in the perpetration of serious criminal acts. The challenge of such trafficking is multidimensional and must be tackled by various means, including comprehensive marking, tracing and recordkeeping, robust border controls and strong national legislation, including criminalization, as well as effective criminal justice responses to the crimes committed.

73. Access to weapons by criminal groups can be a source of revenue and an enabler of additional criminal acts, including trafficking in other illicit materials and persons. I note the recognition by the Security Council of the linkages between international terrorism and organized crime, including how terrorists can benefit from organized crime as a source of financial or logistical support through trafficking in arms, persons, drugs and cultural property (see resolution [2482 \(2019\)](#)).

74. International cooperation and information-sharing are critical to combating the threat of acquisition of weapons by criminal groups. In this regard, the Security Council, in its resolution 2482 (2019), called upon Member States to consider establishing appropriate laws and mechanisms that allowed for the broadest possible international cooperation. When establishing relevant national laws, States may consider including protection for witnesses and whistle-blowers that could encourage information-sharing with law enforcement authorities.

75. Full adherence to the Organized Crime Convention and its Firearms Protocol is imperative in this context. Relevant provisions include legislative requirements and the criminalization of offences relating to the illicit manufacturing and marking of and trafficking in firearms, as well as preventive, security and regulatory control measures. The Convention and the Protocol safeguard the legal market and support coherent law enforcement and criminal justice responses to cases of illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition, as well as international cooperation and information exchange.

76. I welcome a holistic approach in responding to the challenges of terrorism and illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons, along with other forms of serious and organized crime. **A comprehensive approach to the nexus between illicit trafficking, organized crime and terrorism is encouraged, thus leveraging expertise, tools and information available on such crimes and on all forms of trafficking, including in persons and drugs. The Security Council, including through the work of relevant committees and panels of experts, is encouraged to continue to consider how illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons and organized crime can be mutually reinforcing in some regions.**

#### IV. Concluding observations

77. The Security Council agenda has expanded as new threats to international peace and security have emerged and existing threats have become more complex. The relevance of the excessive accumulation and misuse of, and illicit trade in, small arms and light weapons and their ammunition is evident throughout the agenda of the Security Council in both country-specific and thematic discussions. Better integrating considerations on arms and ammunition could enhance the impact of the Council's work to promote international peace and security.

78. Compartmentalized treatment of the small arms and light weapons issue is not sufficient to address the seriousness and magnitude of the challenges. The negative consequences of illicit small arms and light weapons are manifested in contexts ranging from human rights, counter-terrorism, organized crime, peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance and socioeconomic development to refugees and internal displacement, gender and children's rights. If the challenges are to be adequately addressed, they have to be considered regularly and across issue areas. Existing resources, such as relevant aides-memoires and the Saving Lives Entity fund dedicated to small arms, could assist the Security Council and all Member States in this endeavour.

79. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development contains calls for a significant reduction in all forms of violence and related deaths, as well as illicit arms flows. Deaths related to small arms and light weapons in both conflict and non-conflict situations must be significantly reduced if the international community is to make meaningful progress. It is a matter of urgency for the United Nations, the Security Council and the broader international community to focus on the root causes of these flows, including the poor management of State-owned stockpiles and cross-border trafficking.