



Security Council

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Small arms and light weapons

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to resolution [2220 \(2015\)](#) and the request to the Secretary-General to continue to submit biennial reports on the issue of small arms and light weapons.

Since the previous report ([S/2019/1011](#)), small arms and light weapons have continued to play a central role in initiating, exacerbating and sustaining armed conflict, pervasive violence and acts of crime and terrorism.

The humanitarian impact of illicit small arms and light weapons flows, as well as the negative implications for sustainable development and sustaining peace, remained fully apparent.

In line with past practice, concluding observations and recommendations are offered with a view to supporting Member States in their efforts to effectively tackle threats arising from the misuse, illicit transfer and destabilizing accumulation of small arms and light weapons. Various recommendations are also offered throughout the thematic sections.



I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to resolution [2220 \(2015\)](#) and the request to the Secretary-General to continue to submit reports on the issue of small arms and light weapons on a biennial basis.
2. Since the previous report ([S/2019/1011](#)), threats related to the misuse, illicit transfer and destabilizing accumulation of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition have remained a defining factor in undermining peace and security at the national, regional and global levels. From the Central African Republic to Libya, South Sudan, the Sudan and Yemen, the proliferation of and illicit trafficking in those weapons have deeply aggravated situations for vulnerable populations already suffering from conflict.
3. At least 176,095 civilian deaths were recorded in 12 of the world's deadliest armed conflicts between 2015 and 2020. In 2020, five civilians per 100,000 people were killed in armed conflict, and one in seven of those was a woman or a child. Most civilian deaths were caused by small arms and light weapons (27 per cent) or by heavy weapons and explosive munitions (24 per cent).¹ The death toll of armed violence occurring outside of conflict is even higher. Globally, more than half of all victims of homicide are killed with a firearm.²
4. A continued rise in global military spending has fed into cycles of insecurity and mistrust. In 2020, total global military expenditure rose to almost 2 trillion United States dollars, despite the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.
5. In the light of the urgency to rein in conflict in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Secretary-General called for an immediate, global ceasefire in March 2020. While several regional organizations, 200 civil society groups and more than a dozen non-State armed groups, including several parties to ongoing armed conflict, have publicly endorsed that call, that rhetorical commitment has not yielded sufficient, tangible results.
6. While conflict continued unabated amidst the pandemic, some actors also used the worldwide shift in focus to step up their covert, irregular or unchecked supply of weapons and ammunition in theatres of conflict, leading to massive increases in new supplies that are at risk of diversion in conflict and post-conflict situations. Illegal markets, including the market for illicit small arms and light weapons, continued to operate and adapt to the circumstances.
7. The cross-cutting security, humanitarian and socioeconomic impact of the misuse, illicit transfer and destabilizing accumulation of small arms and light weapons continued to make itself known at the national, regional and global levels and to affect vulnerable groups, including children, disproportionately.
8. Regional efforts still remain critical. States continued to recognize the distinct regional dimension of the small arms scourge, including by elaborating and further developing regional road maps for combating the illicit flow of small arms and light weapons in the Caribbean, the Western Balkans and West Africa.

¹ See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2021/goal-16/>.

² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Global Study on Homicide: Executive Summary* (Vienna, 2019).

II. Trends and developments

9. In contexts where United Nations peace operations have been mandated, the scourge of illicit arms flows have further heightened human suffering and hindered peace efforts. As the international community intensifies its action towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, committed efforts to find sustainable solutions to combat illicit arms flows are essential.

10. The role of small arms and light weapons must be taken into account in discussions on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The expert meeting held by the Government of Switzerland in November 2020 dedicated to international humanitarian law and practice in performing medical activities in armed conflict included such topics as managing the presence of weapons in medical transports and facilities (S/2021/423, para. 68).

11. The Security Council remained actively seized of threats posed by illicit flows of small arms and light weapons and their associated ammunition, in particular in situations of armed conflict. In South Sudan, the steady supply of weapons and ammunition has intensified the nature and scale of intercommunal violence and directly affected the safety of United Nations personnel.

12. Efforts to prevent the acquisition of weapons by terrorists were also maintained, including through the development by the United Nations of guidance on the implementation of resolution 2370 (2017). Those guidelines are aimed at identifying challenges and opportunities for strengthening preventive measures and cooperation, also taking into account emerging technologies, to facilitate the implementation of resolution 2370 (2017), relevant subsequent resolutions, good practices and relevant international standards.

13. In March 2020, in connection with its consideration of the item entitled “Peace and Security in Africa”, the Security Council issued a presidential statement in which it recognized the impact and challenges posed by the illicit trade in and diversion of small arms and light weapons in Africa, which enables terrorist groups to considerably increase their armed capabilities (S/PRST/2020/5).

14. The impact of illicit arms flows throughout the Sahel and parts of the Central African subregion remains of concern. The availability of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition in the subregion escalates local disputes and enables violent extremists, terrorists and organized crime and armed groups to control large territories.

15. Arms-related provisions, including those specific to small arms and light weapons, continued to be implemented in the context of the United Nations peace operations in Abyei, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Libya, South Sudan and the Sudan. This growing number is indicative of the role of United Nations support for conventional weapons control in the context of building and sustaining peace, including through weapons and ammunition management and small arms and light weapons control measures.

16. The Security Council integrated weapons-related language into country-specific resolutions, underscoring the negative impact of illicit weapons and ammunition flows on the peace, security and stability of the States concerned. Echoing its resolution 2117 (2013), the Council expressed concern over the threat to peace and security arising from the illicit transfer, accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons in Mali, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen.³

³ See resolutions 2584 (2021), 2520 (2020), 2514 (2020) and 2511 (2020), respectively.

17. The mandates of recently established United Nations peace operations, including for the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti and the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan (UNITAMS),⁴ integrate weapons and ammunition management as a key pillar for supporting peace processes, good governance, the reduction of violence, and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. For established missions such as the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, the Security Council has enhanced the related language on weapons and ammunition management.

18. **States are encouraged to consider the relevance of weapons dynamics in its thematic discussions, including children and armed conflict, peacekeeping, mine action, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, and women and peace and security.**⁵ The recognition by the Security Council of the interlinkages between security sector reform and other important factors of stabilization and reconstruction, including national small arms and light weapons management, through the adoption of resolution 2553 (2020) is welcome.

A. Development, humanitarian and security impacts of the illicit transfer, excessive accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons

1. Sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

19. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Goal 16, on peace, justice and strong institutions, is demonstrative of the close linkage between peace and development.

20. The collection of small arms and light weapons used in the context of armed conflict, violent crime and drug trafficking and the establishment of their illicit origin are important steps towards promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, in line with Goal 16.

21. According to data received from States through biennial reports on 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, national authorities collected 758,000 illicit small arms and light weapons from 2016 to 2019. According to the *Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020*, published by the Monitoring Illicit Arms Flows initiative of the United Nations, a total of 550,000 firearms were reported as seized during each of 2016 and 2017. The data indicate that the country of manufacture and the country where diversions and seizures take place are often not the same. Therefore, the responsibility that manufacturing countries have to prevent the diversion of firearms, their parts and components and ammunition requires thorough risk assessments combined with effective post-delivery measures. That said, the real global figure of seized and collected small arms and light weapons is believed to be much higher, owing to underreporting, including as a result of a lack of reporting capacity. **Building the capacity of Member States to report the number of seized and collected small arms and light weapons will be crucial for monitoring progress on indicator 16.4.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals. States are encouraged to develop synergies among their distinct reporting obligations.**

⁴ See resolutions 2476 (2019) and 2524 (2020), respectively.

⁵ See S/2019/1011.

22. There is a clear need to ensure national ownership as a guiding principle on all issues related to small arms and light weapons. In that regard, a review of the United Nations Coordinating Action on Small Arms Mechanism, which supports holistic United Nations action for assisting States in controlling small arms and light weapons, has been initiated. Increased emphasis on national ownership will help to identify specific needs and gaps at the national level, support country-level programmes and the subsequent implementation of comprehensive and multidisciplinary small arms programmes and facilitate the active engagement of United Nations country teams with national authorities.

23. With a view to providing effective, efficient and coherent United Nations assistance, two initiatives have been launched. First, United Nations Coordinating Action on Small Arms Mechanism partners are developing system-wide guidance on country-level approaches to integrate small arms control into the common country analysis and sustainable development frameworks, in line with the guiding principle of national ownership. In addition, the Saving Lives Entity – a funding facility within the Peacebuilding Fund, developed further to a joint partnership between the Office for Disarmament Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme – has begun the allocation of grants to catalyse more comprehensive approaches to small arms and armed violence reduction in priority countries.

2. Grave implications for children

24. In 2020, the situation of children in armed conflict was marked by a sustained high number of grave violations (see [A/75/873-S/2021/437](#)). In this context, the escalation of conflict and armed clashes, often fuelled by the availability of small arms and light weapons, and disregard for international humanitarian law and international human rights law had a severe impact on the protection of children. Mitigating the impact of conventional arms, including small arms and light weapons, is central to ensuring that children do not bear the brunt of armed conflict as they currently do. With more than 8,400 children killed or maimed, as verified by the United Nations in 21 situations on the children and armed conflict agenda and in the Lake Chad basin, small arms and light weapons can play a significant part in the commission of grave violations against children and in the denial of their rights. While attacks on hospitals decreased and those on schools increased, and were often committed using small arms and light weapons, both continued to endanger children and are particularly egregious in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

25. 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](#)).

26. All small arms and light weapons control initiatives should be carried out with due attention to their potential impacts on children. Such initiatives should be linked to other programmes related to children, adolescents and young people, such as access to justice for children; adolescent and youth employment initiatives; the separation and reintegration of children from armed groups and armed forces and child-specific disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; and community-based child protection.

3. Gendered dimensions, including women and peace and security

27. While the availability of small arms and light weapons in armed conflict, post-conflict settings and non-conflict situations affect both women and men, a growing body of research suggests a significant link between gender and small arms.

28. While far more men than women die at gunpoint, men make up the vast majority of small arms owners and dominate professions with easy access to those weapons and arms-related activities, such as hunting and sport shooting. The possession, use and misuse of small arms are closely linked with certain roles, practices and expectations attributed to men that encourage at times violent behaviour. As such, the ready availability of small arms plays a particularly egregious role in maintaining male-dominated social norms and acts as an enabler and power multiplier that frequently facilitates violence against women and girls.

29. Even though women constitute a minority of victims of homicide overall, they suffer disproportionately from firearms violence.⁶ Women are particularly at risk in a domestic context, from their intimate partners, and in countries where weapons are easily available. In conflict and post-conflict settings, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, along with the threat of violence, can be used coercively to force women into illegal activities, forced marriage, rape, slavery and human trafficking. The presence of a small arm amplifies psychological violence, severely deteriorating the sense of security for distressed women, both in the public space and at home. As a result, when insecurity is widespread, small arms and light weapons represent a serious threat to women and girls, generally reducing their space and mobility in society, preventing them from fully participating in public life, hindering their economic empowerment and affecting their political participation.

30. Small arms and light weapons control efforts converge with the objective of the women and peace and security agenda on all four interconnected pillars, namely, participation, prevention, protection and relief and recovery. Understanding 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 Security Council's encouragement to States to streamline their small arms and light weapons control efforts with those related to women and peace and security and conflict-related sexual violence would be helpful, in particular by ensuring frequent exchanges between national focal points and harmonizing national action plans under the respective portfolios.**⁷

31. In its resolutions [2122 \(2013\)](#) and [2242 \(2015\)](#), the Security Council explicitly referred to the full and effective participation of women in arms control and disarmament decision-making at all levels and in all aspects of conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Given the underrepresentation of women in the field of small arms and light weapons control, their inclusion must continue to be fostered.⁸

32. In the latest report on conflict-related sexual violence ([S/2021/312](#)), the role played by the proliferation and illicit circulation of small arms in facilitating violence against civilians, including rape, was recognized, underscoring the nexus between conflict-related sexual violence and the diversion of small arms. **The proliferation**

⁶ UNODC, *Global Study on Homicide: Understanding Homicide: Typologies, Demographic Factors, Mechanisms and Contributors* (Vienna, 2019).

⁷ Henry Myrntinen, *Connecting the Dots: Arms Control, Disarmament and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda* (Geneva, UNIDIR, 2020).

⁸ Hana Salama and Emma Bjertén-Günther, *Women Managing Weapons: Perspectives for Increasing Women's Meaningful Participation in Weapons and Ammunition Management* (Geneva, United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), 2021).

of and trafficking in small arms, which drive and exacerbate the commission of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict zones, must be addressed in line with the Arms Trade Treaty and other global instruments.

33. In her report on the impact of arms transfers on human rights issued in June 2020 ([A/HRC/44/29](#)), the High Commissioner for Human Rights noted that the ownership and use of arms related closely to specific expressions of masculinity, power and control that furthered gender-based discrimination against women and girls, and she stressed that it was essential to address the gendered root causes of violence. **The Security Council is encouraged to consider the recommendations contained in that report, including the call to promote the participation of women in all arms control and disarmament processes and forums.**

34. While the lack of data disaggregated by gender and age in the field of small arms and light weapons and ammunition often hampers the development of effective gender-responsive initiatives, there are practically no data to differentiate the impact of licit and illicit small arms and light weapons by gender and age. **The Security Council's support for the collection of data on small arms and light weapons, disaggregated by sex and age, and further disaggregated by their licit or illicit origin, when including mandates on small arms and light weapons control in its decisions, would be particularly relevant. Member States are encouraged to support civil society organizations, especially women's organizations, and international organizations with sustainable funding to undertake data collection activities in that regard.**

35. Gender-related considerations continued to be integrated into discussions held in the framework of the 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 (Firearms Protocol). At its tenth session, in October 2020, the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime remained concerned about the negative impact of illicit trafficking in firearms on the lives of women, men, girls and boys, and recognized that preventing, combating and eradicating illicit trafficking in firearms were crucial to combating gender-based violence. The Conference encouraged States parties to mainstream gender and age perspectives in firearms policies and programmes and invited States parties to further collect gender- and age-disaggregated data on illicit trafficking in firearms.

36. In the framework of the Programme of Action on Small Arms, States have made considerable progress on the issue of gender since 2016 and have committed themselves to increasing their understanding of the gender-specific impacts of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons; promoting the meaningful participation and representation of women in policymaking, planning and implementation processes related to the implementation of the Programme of Action; collecting disaggregated data; and seriously considering increased funding for policies and programmes that take account of the differing impacts of illicit small arms and light weapons on women, men, girls and boys. Building on the significant progress made in 2016 and 2018, the outcome document of the 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, held in July 2021, contained strong language on the highly gendered nature of small arms and light weapons and called for the equal, full and effective participation of women in all processes related to the Programme of Action ([A/CONF.192/BMS/2021/1](#), annex).

4. Linkages to terrorism and transnational organized crime

37. In its resolutions 1373 (2001), 2370 (2017), 2462 (2019) and 2482 (2019), the Security Council, consistently stressed the need to address the illicit traffic in and supply of small arms and light weapons to terrorists and recognized that terrorist organizations could benefit from transnational organized crime, including the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons, as a source of financing.

38. According to recent research from the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, in the past decade, terrorists have used small arms and light weapons to carry out 85,148 terrorist attacks.⁹ At the same time, small arms and light weapons can serve as a lucrative and durable trafficking commodity or as a tool allowing terrorist organizations to facilitate trafficking activities carried out by others, for example, by forcefully controlling trafficking routes and providing protection from theft and armed robbery. In many cases, existing illicit trade routes overlap significantly with territory controlled by terrorists.

39. In addition to weapons smuggled illegally across borders, including by foreign terrorist fighters, terrorist organizations also rely on legal commercial supply chains to procure weapons, ammunition and essential parts and components, including for improvised explosive devices. **States are encouraged to enhance their efforts to detect and seize parts and components of weapons and ammunition, including when shipped through fast parcel deliveries, to support the fight against various types of illicit manufacture, including conversion and craft production.**

40. Terrorists and organized criminal groups continue to exploit and benefit from a lack of good governance and rule of law, porous borders, high levels of corruption, weak democratic institutions and poor criminal justice systems. Terrorism and transnational organized crime can cross-fertilize each other, while small arms and light weapons can serve as an enabling factor for both phenomena. **States and the United Nations should address the terrorism-arms-crime nexus as interrelated and multifaceted security threats that require complementary approaches and responses.**

41. Counter-terrorism financing measures play a crucial role in preventing and counteracting the linkages between terrorism and the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons. In that regard, the Financial Action Task Force published in March 2021 a report on terrorist financing risks related to illicit arms trafficking in which it identified several measures that Member States could take to detect those linkages, including the conduct of proactive terrorist financing investigations to trace financial flows between illicit arms traffickers and terrorists, and the reinforcement of financial intelligence capabilities to detect linkages with terrorism.

42. Border controls play a crucial role in combating the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons in the context of counter-terrorism efforts. **In order to detect and prevent the movement of illicit small arms and light weapons across borders effectively, States should develop and implement comprehensive border security and management strategies and engage all relevant national agencies effectively.**

43. Recently, in its seventh review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the General Assembly recognized the importance of preventing, combating and eradicating the illicit use of small arms and light weapons by terrorists and strongly condemned the continued flow of weapons to and between terrorists. The Assembly called upon all Member States to find ways of intensifying and accelerating

⁹ Reinier Bergema, Tanya Mehra and Méryl Demuyneck, “The Use of Small Arms and Light Weapons by Terrorist Organisations as a Source of Finance”, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism report (The Hague, 2020).

the related exchange of information, to enhance coordination at all levels and to establish as a criminal offense the illegal manufacture, possession and stockpiling of and trade in small arms and light weapons and their ammunition.

44. In Central Asia, the United Nations, through a joint collaboration between the Counter-Terrorism Centre, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Office for Disarmament Affairs, continued to enhance the capacities of national authorities to prevent and combat the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons and their illicit supply to terrorists and supported the States of the region in the implementation of resolution [2370 \(2017\)](#) and of the Madrid Guiding Principles. This inter-agency project is adaptable to other regions.

B. Weapons and ammunition management

45. Inadequately maintained stockpiles constitute serious humanitarian hazards, have a negative impact on peace and security and can thereby jeopardize the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

46. The United Nations continued to enhance its support for national authorities, including in the framework of its peace operations, in the area of weapons and ammunition management. Through the Agenda for Disarmament and the Action for Peacekeeping initiative, the Secretary-General has committed the United Nations to promoting more effective weapons and ammunition management in peace operations, including when part of or linked to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes.

47. Concrete, practical support for the destruction of materiel and management of stockpiles was provided in a range of contexts. In 2019, the Mine Action Service extended its support to the assessment, rehabilitation and construction of 242 weapons storage areas and 97 ammunition storage areas. In the Central African Republic, training and assistance for national defence and internal security forces were provided, alongside the rehabilitation and establishment of storage sites. Technical advice was provided to the National Commission for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons and the Reduction of Armed Violence and the national defence and security forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In Libya, where small arms and light weapons are prevalent, risk education efforts were pursued. The Mine Action Service also supported the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei in fulfilling its mandate to support a “weapons-free” area by destroying weapons and ammunition confiscated by the mission and building the technical capacities and physical infrastructure to store weapons and ammunition safely (resolution [2575 \(2021\)](#)).

48. Integrated disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes increasingly take place in environments characterized by well-equipped armed groups and high levels of illicit weapons, ammunition and explosives. In response to those risks, innovative tools have been developed to complement traditional disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes, including community violence reduction and transitional weapons and ammunition management. As part of the community violence reduction programme in the Central African Republic, 63 war weapons, 1,393 artisanal weapons, 143 rounds of ammunition and 20 unexploded ordnances have been collected since 12 August 2021. Increased community violence in the central part of Mali calls for a strengthened and coordinated action to reduce access to weapons and ammunition at the community level, in particular along the tri-border area of Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger.

49. The United Nations continued the implementation of a joint initiative on the effective weapons and ammunition management in a changing disarmament, demobilization and reintegration context to provide expert resources and guidance¹⁰ in the design and implementation of tailored weapons and ammunition management activities as part of integrated disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes. A corresponding training course has been delivered since 2019. A standing technical assistance mechanism was established in 2019 to provide support in line with the guidance and expert resources developed under the initiative. Through the mechanism, the United Nations continued, for example, to assist the national authorities in Haiti in establishing a comprehensive arms control framework. The mechanism also facilitated a study on weapons and ammunition dynamics in the Sudan to support the start of UNITAMS in 2020.

50. In July 2021, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research published *A Reference Methodology for National Weapons and Ammunition Management Baseline Assessments*.¹¹ The methodology had been used to design and implement national baseline assessments in 10 States (from 2015 to 2020) to assist States in assessing their relevant institutions, policy and operational capacities in that area. The establishment of such baselines enables the measurement of progress over time, as well as the impact of strengthened national practices. National baseline assessments link with, respond to and feed into relevant Security Council resolutions.

51. **The Security Council is encouraged to promote the sustained and systematic integration of weapons and ammunition management into the work of the United Nations on peace and security, including when mandating peace operations. In addition, it is recommended that the Council include more systematically references to relevant normative frameworks and guidance, such as the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines and the Modular Small-arms-control Implementation Compendium, in applicable resolutions of the Council, in line with the good practice highlighted in the *Aide-Memoire: Options for Reflecting Weapons and Ammunition Management in Decisions of the Security Council*.** A second edition of the latter publication, which is aimed at assisting Member States, in particular those serving on the Council, in accurately and comprehensively reflecting state-of-the-art practices related to weapons and ammunition management in relevant decisions of the Council, was published in 2020.¹²

C. Arms embargoes, including benchmark assessments

52. Illicit transfers of small arms and light weapons in the context of arms embargo violations remain a concern. **States in which arms are shipped through ports, airports or territorial waters for transfer to embargoed countries should redouble their efforts to enforce the embargoes by applying the preventive and criminal justice measures provided under the relevant international instruments.**

53. In recent years, the Security Council has increasingly used a partial lifting of arms embargoes as a way to help States under embargo to strengthen national security services. This practice has seen, in parallel, the increasingly frequent introduction of weapons and ammunition management-related commitments and measures as part of

¹⁰ *Effective Weapons and Ammunition Management in a Changing Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Context*, 2nd ed. (United Nations publication, 2021).

¹¹ Hardy Giezendanner and Himayu Shiotani, *Reference Methodology for National Weapons and Ammunition Management Baseline Assessments* (Geneva, UNIDIR, 2021).

¹² *Aide-Mémoire: Options for Reflecting Weapons and Ammunition Management in Decisions of the Security Council*, 2nd ed. (United Nations publication, 2020).

the partial lifting of an arms embargo to address potential risks of arms diversion by those security services and illicit arms proliferation and misuse.¹³

54. The further employment of weapons and ammunition management by the Security Council as part of the benchmark assessments of arms embargoes is a welcome development. There is an ongoing need, nevertheless, to improve the national and regional implementation and enforcement of arms embargoes, as well as weapons and ammunition management standards and guidelines.

55. The Security Council has increasingly called upon States to investigate and combat transnational criminal networks and armed groups involved in arms trafficking in the context of violations of arms embargoes (e.g. resolution [2488 \(2019\)](#)). COVID-19-related restrictions enhanced the challenges faced by sanctions expert panels in conducting on-site inspections of weapons seized in connection with arms embargoes imposed by the Council. **In this context, the Security Council is encouraged to continue to seek reports from Member States on the steps that they have taken to implement the relevant measures, including arms embargoes, as well as to cooperate and share information with the panels.**

56. In its resolution [2562 \(2021\)](#), the Security Council, requested the Secretary-General to conduct a review of the situation in Darfur, including measures to tackle the proliferation of weapons, and to provide recommendations for key benchmarks that could serve in guiding the Council in its review of the measures on Darfur. In his assessment submitted pursuant to that resolution ([S/2021/696](#)), he recommended four key benchmarks, including the completion of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme, in order to support progress on transitional security arrangements in Darfur. He also recommended the review and updating of the weapons collection programme as a complement to the implementation of the national action plan for the protection of civilians of the Sudan.

57. The Security Council has progressively adjusted the arms embargo measures in the Central African Republic and requested the Secretary-General to assess and provide three updates on progress achieved by the Government on the key benchmarks that it had established on arms embargo measures, including weapons and ammunition management.¹⁴ In his assessment submitted pursuant to resolution [2488 \(2019\)](#), the Secretary-General noted that the Government, with the support of its international partners, had continued to make some progress on the arms embargo benchmarks and that the decision of the Council to adjust the arms embargo placed on the Government had provided national authorities with encouragement. He also noted that careful attention was required to ensure that the arms embargo on the armed groups, which remained in full effect, had the necessary and desired outcomes to benefit the security and political situation in the country (see [S/2019/1008](#)). In his assessment submitted pursuant to resolution [2507 \(2020\)](#), the Secretary-General noted that the Government remained committed to achieving the benchmarks in order for the arms embargo measures to be further eased or lifted. He also noted that the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [2127 \(2013\)](#) concerning the Central African Republic and its Panel of Experts could help the Government and regional States to adopt the necessary measures against arms traffickers (see [S/2020/622](#)). In his assessment submitted pursuant to resolution [2536 \(2020\)](#), the Secretary-General noted that the collaboration of the Government of the Central African Republic with MINUSCA, including through the Mine Action Service, and international partners was needed to make further progress in the

¹³ See UNIDIR, *Applying Conventional Arms Control in the Context of United Nations Arms Embargoes* (2018).

¹⁴ See resolutions [2488 \(2019\)](#), [2507 \(2020\)](#) and [2536 \(2020\)](#).

operation of an effective weapons and ammunition management system (see [S/2021/573](#)).

58. The Secretary-General submitted two reports to the Security Council concerning the arms embargo measures in South Sudan. In his assessment submitted pursuant to resolution [2521 \(2020\)](#), he provided three options for developing benchmarks to assess those measures according to progress on the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (see [S/2020/1067](#)). In response to a request from the members of the Council to elaborate specific benchmarks, he recommended three benchmarks, including progress on disarmament, demobilization and security sector reform (see [S/2021/321](#)).¹⁵ The Council took note of the recommendations when it adopted resolution [2577 \(2021\)](#), which set out key benchmarks to consider when reviewing the arms embargo measures on South Sudan. One of the benchmarks was progress by South Sudanese defence and security forces on properly managing their existing arms and ammunition stockpiles, including by establishing planning documents, protocols and training for the recording, storage, distribution and management of weapons and ammunition.

D. Recent developments in the manufacture, design and technology of small arms and light weapons

59. Of continuous concern is the impact of new and emerging technologies on the illicit trafficking in and production of small arms, light weapons, their parts and components and ammunition.

60. States have continued to express concern over the illicit reactivation of deactivated small arms, including firearms. The Modular Small-arms-control Implementation Compendium notes that deactivation requires that all pressure-bearing components of a small arm be permanently altered in such a way as to render the weapon unusable.¹⁶ Article 9 of the Firearms Protocol sets out the general principles of deactivation.

61. The introduction of new material technologies in the context of small arms and light weapons manufacture and design has created security challenges. Specifically, the use of polymer plastics in weapon manufacture has raised concerns, as markings on such material are more vulnerable to erasure and alteration than on more traditional materials, such as steel. The integration of modularity, whereby a weapon has multiple components that can be reconfigured, also presents challenges for ensuring the inclusion of a unique marking on the essential or structural component.

62. Online purchases of weapons, including on the darknet, are a growing concern, as online availability might lower psychological barriers and inhibition thresholds to acquisition. Online weapons sales have resulted in a significant increase in the use of postal and courier services to traffic in those items, owing to their relatively high standard of anonymity, making criminal investigations into illicit transfers difficult.

63. In the Kyoto Declaration on Advancing Crime Prevention, Criminal Justice and the Rule of Law: Towards the Achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted at the Fourteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice ([A/CONF.234/16](#), resolution 1), States committed to strengthening mechanisms and strategies for border control for preventing and combating the illicit trafficking in and diversion of firearms, their parts and components and ammunition, including online trade, and the illicit reactivation of

¹⁵ See [S/2020/1277](#).

¹⁶ See *Modular Small-arms-control Implementation Compendium: Glossary of Terms, Definitions and Abbreviations*, version 1.5 (United Nations publication, 2018).

deactivated firearms, as well as to enhancing cooperation to address and counter threats related to technological developments and changing *modi operandi* with regard to the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition and investigate and prosecute those crimes.

64. Discussions in the framework of transnational organized crime also continued to focus on the implications of recent technological developments related to firearms. The Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime invited States parties to the Firearms Protocol to foster and harmonize their responses to modular weapons and the 3D printing of firearms, the conversion of firearms, trafficking through postal services and the use of the darknet and cryptocurrencies (CTOC/COP/2020/10, resolution 10/2, para. 14). At the seventh meeting of the Working Group on Firearms, States recognized the threat posed by the 3D printing of firearms, the reactivation of deactivated firearms and the illicit trade in firearms over the Internet.¹⁷

65. Discussions within the framework of the Programme of Action on Small Arms and the complementary International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons have covered those topics from the perspective of the implications of new technologies on marking, record-keeping and tracing. At the Seventh Biennial Meeting of States, States expressed divergent views on how to pursue the issue further. Nevertheless, they agreed to continue to exchange views on recent developments in small arms and light weapons manufacturing, technology and design, in particular polymer and modular weapons, and on ways to address them. They also agreed to consider at the Eighth Biennial Meeting a proposal for an open-ended technical expert group that could develop action-oriented next steps. In addition, they requested the Secretariat to develop a good practice document on marking practices for modular and polymer weapons taking into account the views of all Member States and the role of manufacturers.¹⁸

E. Climate-related security risks and the role of small arms and light weapons

66. Climate-related security risks have been under discussion for more than a decade, including under the auspices of the Security Council. As the effects of climate change become more pronounced, a higher level of political will to address security-related risks emerges, and a growing number of States have advocated concrete, more consistent action to address the potential impact of climate change on peace and security.

67. Often intersecting with other trends, climate change is a potential risk multiplier with cascading effects that can exacerbate tensions and contribute to conflict, which may already be aggravated by the presence of small arms and, in turn, fuel the demand for more arms. There is also a growing body of research on the link between the effects of climate change and organized crime and armed group activities, with potential implications for the use of small arms and light weapons.

68. In western and eastern African countries, including Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Uganda, the increasing availability of weapons is a contributing factor to the recent escalation in deadly disputes between farmers and pastoralists over shrinking water resources and fertile land. Connections between communities across borders, for example in the tri-border region of Kenya, South Sudan and

¹⁷ See CTOC/COP/WG.6/2020/2 and CTOC/COP/WG.6/2020/4.

¹⁸ [A/CONF.192/BMS/2021/1](#), paras. 92 and 94.

Uganda, facilitate cross-border trafficking in small arms and light weapons with the aim of arming themselves to protect their livelihood. Such local resource disputes increasingly connect with national and regional conflict dynamics, escalating levels of community violence and dragging armed groups into the theatre of conflict. Climate change can intensify disputes linked to natural resources, exacerbate local community grievances, destroy licit livelihood options and, as a result, provide armed groups with opportunities to boost recruitment and support. In north and central Mali, for example, armed groups have exploited such issues as land rights and capitalized on limited State presence by mediating resource disputes, providing support to farmers and herders and defining rules for livestock migration.

69. **As conventional weapons remain a primary cause of death in armed conflict, the examination of how climate change affects the use of conventional weapons and how conventional arms availability and use affect climate-related security risks is warranted. States, civil society and relevant expert organizations are encouraged to consider this linkage in more detail.**

III. Global, regional and subregional efforts to address illicit small arms and light weapons

A. Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects

70. At the Seventh Biennial Meeting of States, States considered key challenges and opportunities for the full and effective implementation of both frameworks at the national, regional and global levels for the purposes of preventing and combating the diversion and illicit international transfer of small arms and light weapons to unauthorized recipients. They deliberated on two additional substantive items, namely, recent developments in weapons technology, manufacture and design, and international cooperation and assistance, including proposals for the future establishment of a training fellowship programme and the setting of national and regional targets to enhance measurability in the implementation of the Programme of Action on Small Arms and its International Tracing Instrument. The Seventh Biennial Meeting concluded with the unanimous adoption of a substantive outcome document.

B. Arms Trade Treaty

71. States parties to the Arms Trade Treaty continued to address small arms and light weapons diversion as part of the ongoing work to enhance transparency around and responsibility for international trade in conventional arms.

72. Under the Treaty, States parties are required to establish a national control system to implement the provisions of the Treaty. Under article 11, States parties involved in the transfer of conventional arms, including small arms and light weapons, are required to take measures to prevent their diversion through their national control systems, by assessing the risk of diversion of the exports and considering the establishment of mitigation measures.

73. The work on diversion under the Treaty is guided by the Sub-Working Group on article 11 under the Working Group on Effective Treaty Implementation. In 2020, the Sixth Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty established the Diversion Information Exchange Forum, which is a *sui generis* body for informal voluntary exchanges between States parties to the Treaty concerning concrete cases of detected or suspected diversion and for sharing concrete, operational diversion-

related information. Furthermore, in 2021, the core thematic focus of the President of the Seventh Conference of States Parties, the Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations Office at Geneva, was the strengthening of efforts to eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and ensure efficient stockpile management.

C. Firearms Protocol

74. The first phase of the Mechanism to Review the Implementation of the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols thereto was launched in December 2020. The Implementation Review Mechanism is a peer review process that will support States parties to the Convention and its Protocols in the effective implementation of those instruments, as well as help States parties to identify and substantiate specific needs for technical assistance and to promote international cooperation. The expert dialogue and its results have the potential to support the Security Council in identifying, highlighting and addressing normative challenges and good practices, including in conflict and post-conflict settings, and to complement existing reporting obligations on small arms, such as those under the Programme of Action on Small Arms, while supporting legislative harmonization efforts across regions.

D. Silencing the Guns in Africa

75. The United Nations has continued to step up its operational and project-based support for the African Union in the framework of its Silencing of the Guns initiative. In line with the decision by the African Union Commission to extend the implementation of the Master Road Map of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa for a period of 10 years (2021–2030), the United Nations will continue to support efforts towards achieving a conflict-free continent in the coming years.

76. The Office for Disarmament Affairs, together with the African Union Commission and the Regional Centre on Small Arms in the Great Lakes Region, the Horn of Africa and Bordering States, delivered practical support for the implementation of the Africa Amnesty Month in seven countries in September 2020. Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia and Kenya conducted large-scale awareness-raising and outreach activities on the negative effects of the illicit ownership of small arms and on the enhanced capacity of national law enforcement in community-based policing and physical security and stockpile management. In 2020, up to 3,090 small arms were securely collected, stored and destroyed.

77. United Nations-supported operational activities and strategic advice on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, community violence reduction and weapons and ammunition management were provided to three peacekeeping missions in Africa, namely, in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali, to three special political missions, namely, in Libya, Somalia and the Sudan, and to the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes. Related weapons and ammunition management technical assistance was provided in six non-mission settings in Africa, namely, in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Congo, Ethiopia, Mozambique and the Lake Chad basin, all with a view to supporting the achievement of the African Union initiative "Silencing the Guns in Africa".

E. Regional road maps for small arms and light weapons control

78. Authorities in the Western Balkans continued to implement the commitments stemming from the road map for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession and misuse of and the trafficking in small arms and light weapons and their ammunition. Ongoing work supported by the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, in close cooperation with the United Nations and international partners, included a review of the relevant legal frameworks; formulation of evidence-based strategies fully integrating the gender perspective; better understanding of the needs of border police services throughout the region in preventing and countering trafficking in firearms; and improved investigations into firearms-related crimes through capacitated firearms focal points. Demonstrable progress was recorded, including the increased security of weapons and ammunition storages, improved marking and tracing and strengthened operational cooperation between law enforcement and criminal justice structures.

79. Following that positive example, with its emphasis on specific targets and timelines, 16 Caribbean States developed and adopted in 2020 the Road Map for Implementing the Caribbean Priority Actions on the Illicit Proliferation of Firearms and Ammunition across the Caribbean in a Sustainable Manner by 2030. The Road Map builds on Caribbean aspirations to combat the illicit trafficking in firearms and enhance resilience and promotes the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It combines four goals: reinforcing regulatory frameworks; reducing illicit arms flows within and beyond the region; bolstering law enforcement capacities to combat illicit firearms trafficking and their illicit possession and misuse; and systematically decreasing the risk of diversion of firearms and ammunition from stockpiles.

80. In September 2019, a technical review of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Materials was held in Niamey, during which member States agreed to the objective of implementing a regional road map and institutional framework that would guide the implementation of the ECOWAS Convention over the coming years. At the ECOWAS annual meeting of national commissioners on small arms control held in Monrovia in November 2019, member States recommended that ECOWAS identify the best options for a road map and a matching institutional framework. In response, in May and June 2020, ECOWAS conducted a mapping exercise of national and regional priorities and consulted West African experts on small arms and light weapons control. During the annual meeting of the national commissioners held in Cotonou, Benin, on 25 and 26 November 2020, ECOWAS, in partnership with the Bonn International Centre for Conversion, presented the content of a five-year plan of action for the implementation of the ECOWAS Convention (2021–2025). At that meeting, all 15 Member States adopted the plan of action. ECOWAS and several stakeholders and partners are currently developing the associated institutional structure and funding mechanism for its implementation.

IV. Concluding observations and recommendations

81. The Security Council remains fully seized of the challenging matter of the illicit transfer, excessive accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons, given the intimate linkage between weapons dynamics and international peace and security. **The Secretary-General continues to advocate the full integration of the consideration of weapons and ammunition into the work of the Security Council, including in its country-specific and thematic discussions.**

82. The 2030 Agenda represent an important step forward towards articulating how arms control, peace and security contribute to development. Beyond addressing illicit arms flows, there remains a vast potential for linking the implementation of disarmament objectives at the operational level with many other Sustainable Development Goals in order to bring the historical relationship between disarmament and development back to the forefront of international attention.

83. United Nations peace operations continue to face different threats and risks directly or indirectly associated with the illicit proliferation, circulation and misuse of arms and ammunition by non-State armed groups, criminals, terrorists and other perpetrators. The systematic processing of weapons and treatment of ammunition recovered from such actors and the illicit sphere, in cooperation with the host State and competent national authorities, are critical to identifying and addressing arms and arms-related risks, vulnerabilities and threats, including those that affect other mandated objectives of the United Nations peace operation.

84. Wherever a mission is mandated to provide support to the host State and competent national authorities in the processing of recovered weapons and the treatment of ammunition recovered from the illicit sphere, the Security Council is encouraged to consider the establishment or designation of a dedicated component, unit or cell within the mission. The Council could explicitly mandate peace operations, in cooperation with relevant United Nations agencies, to trace seized, found and surrendered small arms and light weapons, including their ammunition, in line with international instruments and standards. Such efforts should be coordinated and linked with already existing global data collection exercises to monitor the achievement of target 4 of Sustainable Development Goal 16.

85. In a similar vein, owing to their unique position for monitoring the flows of illicit arms and ammunition in their areas of operation, United Nations peace operations will continue to enhance support for the systematic collection, centralization and analysis of data on seized, found and surrendered small arms and light weapons, including their ammunition. Not only would this help with the collection of data on progress with regard to the achievement of target 4 of Sustainable Development Goal 16, but it could also yield important information about sources and supply chains of armed actors and make important contributions to the monitoring of arms embargoes.

86. The year 2021 marks the coinciding twentieth anniversaries of the Programme of Action on Small Arms and the Firearms Protocol. Those instruments were born out of the firm belief that the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons can be overcome by adequate and harmonized national legal frameworks and enhanced international cooperation. They set a milestone in establishing a rules-based international framework for small arms control. **The Secretary-General will continue to advocate the universalization of relevant legally binding instruments, such as the Firearms Protocol and the Arms Trade Treaty, and the implementation of politically binding instruments, such as the Programme of Action on Small Arms and the International Tracing Instrument.**