Containment of weapon stocks in the Middle East and North Africa region

"The world is awash in small arms and light weapons that account for almost 500 million, enough to have a gun for every 12 people on earth. Most of them are controlled by legal authorities, but when they fall into the hands of terrorists, criminals and irregular forces, small arms bring devastation. Exacerbate conflicts, cause refugee flows, undermines the rule of law and engender a culture of violence and impunity. In short, these weapons are a threat to peace and development, democracy and human rights."

Kofi A. Annan
Secretary General of the United Nations

Introduction to the council

The United Nations Security Council is the main body of the United Nations. He has "primary responsibility for maintaining peace and security" under the UN Charter and has therefore specific powers such as peacekeeping, the establishment of international sanctions and the military intervention. The Security Council issues Presidential Declarations and Resolutions, the latter being for all the UN members which “agree to accept and implement the decisions of the Security Council". It usually meets at UN Headquarters in New York, after serving in various capitals such as London and Addis Ababa. The Council meets on a regular basis but may be convened at any time, particularly in cases of exceptional crisis. The Security Council has five permanents members represented by People Republic of China (Republic of China until 1971), French Republic, Russian Federation (USSR until 1991), United Kingdom and United States and ten non-permanent members with two-year non-renewable terms, with five new members elected each year.

When a complaint concerning a threat to peace is brought before it, the Council's first action is usually to recommend to the parties to try to reach agreement by peaceful means. In some cases, the Council itself undertakes investigation and mediation. It may appoint special representatives or request the Secretary-General to do so or to use his good offices. It may set forth principles for a peaceful settlement. The Presidency of the Council rotates monthly according to the English language alphabetical order.

For more details check the UN Security Council website
Introduction to the topic

The Program of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, (PoA) negotiated in 2001 recommends a set of measures which should be taken at national, regional and international level to address the issue of illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. The International Action Network on Small Arms set highlighted in a 2003 report that "seems to be a significant correlation between the existence of the regional programs, agreements and the extent of progress made by participating countries to implement the PoA."

The Middle East region, as other regions as well, is characterized by traditions associated with positive values such as masculinity, pride and honor. Weapons are part of the everyday life, they are fired at weddings and celebrations as a sign of happiness, and this only reinforces the positive perception upon them. The high rate of possession of weapons by civilians are a social problem they “carrying a gun can give a sense of superiority to some people of a certain group. Thus for these people using a gun becomes natural and familiar, and even something expected from them.”

In addition, this region has witnessed a great number of conflicts in the recent years; the conflict between Israel and Palestine, the most shattering civil wars in Algeria and Yemen, the conflict between the Kurd minority and the majority of the population in Iran and Turkey, the armed insurgencies in Egypt and the continuing state of war between Israel and its neighbors have caused a great outpouring of blood in the past decades. The last decade was also marked by two massive military campaigns in Iraq. War and violence are still prevailing in the region; especially in connection with the conflict in the occupied Palestinian territories. Gun ownership is being regarded as a symbol of pride and “legitimate resistance” thus the degree of domestic criticism against it is perceived by some circles as challenging the legitimacy of the resistance. “For many states in the MENA region human security is becoming an urgent preoccupation. The increasing number of small arms in circulation is a threat to individuals and communities in everyday life. There is an estimation of 50-90 million small arms in the region, of which 80% are in the hands of the civilian population.”

---

1. “Implementing the Program of Action 2003: Action by states and civil society”. Published by International Alert, Safer world and the Center for Cooperation and international security, Department of Peace Studies (Universidad de Bradford), 2003, p. 6.
5. Middle East and North Africa
The SALW\textsuperscript{7} pose a threat to stability and security of states, but also represent a direct and immediate danger to the security of its citizens during peacetime. It is very difficult to document and quantify the cost human small arms violence in the region due to lack of available data on impact criminology, health, economic and psychological use of firearms. Some analysts conclude that the availability of small arms poses no significant threat for human security in the region, arguing that high rates of possession of weapons by civilians not necessarily involve the use or misuse of these weapons. According to some opinions, the possession of weapons in the Middle East has more communicative value than practical, and those same social norms that stimulate demand for possession of weapons can also strictly regulate their use.

Previous United Nations Resolutions on the control of the SALW

The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects


Assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and collecting them


\textsuperscript{7} Small Arms and Light Weapons


Observer status for the Regional Centre on Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region, the Horn of Africa and Bordering States in the General Assembly


Addressing the negative humanitarian and development impact of the illicit manufacture, transfer and circulation of small arms and light weapons and their excessive accumulation


Promotion at the regional level in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe of the United Nations program of action on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects


“Governments have a responsibility to ensure public safety and they have an interest in providing human security and development to their citizens. So they should ensure that small arms from Government stocks or from private ownership are not misused and do not enter illicit circuits, where their use may contribute to instability and to exacerbating poverty.

To attain those goals, within the UN, countries have agreed on several commitments on small arms control: the Firearms Protocol, the Program of Action on small arms - including an Instrument on marking and tracing - and the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.

The topic of small arms comes up in other discussions as well. Countries are giving separate attention to closely related issues, such as armed violence, child soldiers, the protection of civilians in armed conflict, ammunition, the arms trade treaty and the UN register of conventional arms”.

**Issues to be addressed**

- human security;
- local conflicts;
- assistance to the civilian population;
- economic and social development;
- organized crime and the terrorism problem
- gender and environmental impacts of the SALW in MENA
- integration of disarmament with the development initiatives
- poverty impact of the small arms

---

Further references

Webcasts9:

1. 11 July 2003 - Press Conference: International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) wants representatives on the First letter Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate Illicit Trade in Small Arms The Light Weapons and in All Its Aspects: Ms. Rebecca Peters, Director of IANSA; Ms. Afi Yakubu, Director, Foundation for Security and Development in Africa, and Mr. Ruben Cesar Fernandes, director, Viva Rio (Brazil). [Sponsored by the Permanent Mission of New Zealand] [33 mins]: http://www.un.org/webcast/pcb030711.ram

2. 11 July 2003 - Press Conference: Ambassador Kuniko Inoguchi of Japan, Chair of the First Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate Illicit Trade in Small Arms the and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects [22 mins]: http://www.un.org/webcast/pc030711.ram


Bibliography


---

9 List available at http://www.unric.org/de/frieden-und-sicherheit/28

http://www.milmun.org - info@milmun.org
