

**Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate  
Open Briefing on**

**Session I: Addressing the evolution of the threat of terrorists acquiring weapons and  
how to better prevent such illegal activities**

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## **PREVENTING TERRORISTS FROM ACQUIRING WEAPONS**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Terrorism has been increasing steadily in intensity and has spread to many more countries and regions in the past decade. According to the Australia-based Institute for Economics and Peace, 28,328 people were killed in terrorist acts in 2015 alone! It is one of the major security threats faced by the international community.

Weapons help to materialize terrorist intentions. Recent situations have proven that terrorists can use anything, any object, including aircraft, vehicles and the Internet to achieve their egregious aims. While weapons of mass destruction, including chemical weapons are not far off, conventional arms remain the weapons of choice for terrorism. From procurement of materials for use in the production of weapons of mass destruction to illicit flows of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and explosive elements for manufacture of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), there is no shortage of dangers. Terrorists will stop at nothing to exploit any gun control loophole to bring their plans to life.

Individual States, regional organizations and the United Nations have adopted policies, laws, resolutions and mechanisms for disarmament and arms control in an effort to strengthen peace and security, including through preventing the flow of weapons into terrorist networks. The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) assists Member

## **b) Regional level**

A number of regional and international organizations have adopted arms control instruments. Others have also adopted special measures for fighting terrorism. Nevertheless, their effectiveness is challenged by a number of problems which include:

Weak focus on terrorist weapons, as most of the instruments were not adopted with the specific aim of combatting terrorism;

Slow implementation due, in part, to the fact that the arms control instruments have only just entered into force. The 2001 UN Programme of Action on SALW and the 2014 Arms Trade Treaty have been major impetus for the development of the regional instruments. The implementation tradition is therefore relatively short.

Key countries have not ratified the regional instruments.

## **c)**

Another weakness of the PoA is that it does not explicitly cover ammunition, a vital component of the lethality of a firearm. There are situations where terrorists and other criminals use imported ammunition with artisan weapons that are easy to acquire. The production of artisan weapons is poorly or not at all regulated in a number of countries where the technological advancement in their production is not adequately taken into account by the national authorities. High-explosive ammunition can also be used in the manufacture of IEDs.

**International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons (ITI):** The ITI does not explicitly mention

**a) Resources gap- international assistance (financial and technical)**

At national, regional and international levels States and other institutions have complained about the lack of resources for implementing existing policies and measures;

In addition to the lack of financial resources, there is the lack of modern technology and equipment for effective weapons control. Border control is a challenge particularly in developing countries.

**b) Institutional weakness**

Many measures and policies, including relevant UN resolutions, national laws and regional conventions are not systematically accompanied by adequate implementation mechanisms/institutions that can ensure consistency and sustainability. Ad-hoc implementation measures are not always effective.

A number of States still do not have a national focal point or national coordinating institution on the issues of illicit circulation of arms.

**c) Lack of capacity**

There are sectors of arms control such as physical security and stockpile management (including marking, record-keeping, etc.) where modern expertise is lacking in many States.

**d) Insufficient role for CSOs**

In a number States, there is still reluctance in associating non-governmental institutions in the fight against the proliferation of weapons. CSOs have a role to play, especially with regard to outreach, advocacy and awareness-raising, on illicit flows of weapons. This is especially true in rural areas that can serve as transit points of weapons.

**IV. SUGGESTIONS FOR PREVENTING TERRORISTS FROM ACQUIRING WEAPONS**

Remedial measures addressing the illicit flows of weapons to terrorists and other criminals could include the following:

1. The international community should agree on  
This would avoid situations where some governments transfer weapons to non-state actors or groups that are considered by other governments as “terrorist-”

2. States may adopt a **whole-of-Government approach** that brings together all departments and entities with a stake not just in the field of weapons, but also those that have activities in the field of peace and security and development; for example, through establishment of a national commission constituted by all relevant stakeholders.
3. **Effective implementation of existing national, regional and international instruments**, including Security Council and GA resolutions relating to arms control and disarmament. Systematically setting up implementation arrangements and measures for each instrument can be a constructive way forward in ensuring consistency and sustainability of efforts.
4. The **universality of instruments such as the ATT and the Firearms Protocol**, both of which cover SALW, ammunition and parts and components, would enable stronger international mobilization in preventing the flow of weapons into unwanted hands.
5. Greater attention should be paid to **dual-use goods such as fertilizers** that can be used in the manufacture of improvised explosive devices, which are fast becoming a weapon of choice for terrorists.
6. An early **establishment of regulatory regimes for dealing with the issues of ammunition and IEDs** would contribute to lessening the activities of terrorists and other criminals. The ongoing processes on these issues in the UN General Assembly should be encouraged to mature in this direction.
7. With regard to the tracing of illicit weapons, States should be encouraged to nurture a
8. To address the growing developments in weapon technology that complicate the tracing of illicit weapons, the recommendation of the Secretary-General for States to consider adopting a **technical annex to the ITI** remains a valid proposition.
9. States may consider developing a **mechanism for addressing weapon tracing in conflict and post-conflict settings**, which are settings that constitute easy sources of weapons acquisition by terrorists.
10. The international community should step up efforts for the **implementation of SDGs Target 16.4** which calls for the reduction of illicit flows of arms by 2030, including through developing **national and regional indicators** in addition to the global ones on illicit arms. Indicators on illicit ammunition flows could also be considered.

## V. CONCLUSION

Eradicating the phenomenon of terrorism requires the almost impossible task of a far-reaching review and adjustment to the national and international governance and ways of life of peoples and communities. **Preventing terrorists from acquiring firearms** – often a primary tool for violence perpetrated by terrorists—is an important measure in lessening the terrorism phenomenon which, in recent years, has demonstrated astonishing growth in strength and creativity in its means of action.



