



# Brussels seminar seeks international co-operation on tackling SALW in Eastern Africa

Brussels, 13 November 2013

**On 13 November 2013, a seminar on *Enhancing Capacity and Cooperation to Tackle Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and Ammunition in Eastern Africa* was held in Brussels.**

Funded by the European Union (EU) and supported by the European External Action Service (EEAS), this seminar was co-hosted by Saferworld, together with the Africa Peace Forum (APFO) and the China Arms Control and Disarmament Association (CACDA). The seminar attracted 45 participants from various backgrounds, including members of the Africa-China-EU Expert Working Group (EWG) on Conventional Arms, officials from the EU and China, diplomats from EU member states, the Africa Union Commission (AUC) and intergovernmental organisations, together with international scholars from various think tanks and research institutions, as well as NGO representatives.

The one-day seminar included keynote speeches and presentations by senior officials and leading experts in the field of conventional arms controls. Four individual sessions and open discussions took place over the course of the day.

## Challenges and opportunities

Participants shared their perspectives on the major challenges and opportunities in tackling illicit SALW in Eastern Africa. In the context of the global trade and movement of SALW, and given the special characteristics of SALW and the serious impacts of their proliferation, they are regarded as one of the most common security threats in Africa, *inter alia* hindering badly needed socio-economic development in the continent. Participants acknowledged the significance of joint, coordinated actions among the international community, not only on supporting national initiatives and regional instruments but also on regulating the global arms trade through effective implementation of high common standards, in

particular through the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) that was adopted in April this year.

At the continental level, there is an Africa Union (AU) Strategy on the control of illicit proliferation, circulation, and trafficking of SALW. The AUC assists its member states with the implementation of the strategy at the national, regional, and continental levels. At the regional level, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and regional bodies take the initiative on their respective legally binding protocols or conventions on firearms. The Regional Centre on Small Arms (RECSA) coordinates the implementation of the Nairobi Protocol and other relevant international instruments. AU member states have been encouraged by the AUC to sign, speedily ratify, and fully implement the ATT. During the seminar, requests for assistance with the implementation of the ATT were made. Potential areas for cooperation mentioned included capacity building of the National Focal Point coordinators, as well as stockpile management.

## Practical recommendations

Major progress of the Africa-China-EU dialogue on conventional arms has been witnessed in the past year, with an increased number of different interlocutors joining this dialogue process, improved understanding of respective perceptions, positions, and priorities, and increased confidence in information sharing among partners.

Based on this momentum, it is important not only to build upon this dialogue but also to turn to concrete action on the ground. At the same time it was made clear that potential cooperation on the ground has to be linked strongly to political dialogue. Looking towards the future, while emphasising an integrated and holistic approach to tackling illicit SALW in the region, several recommendations were made for sustainable and long-term cooperation with external actors such as the EU and China. Areas of potential

Africa-China-EU collaboration mentioned included conducting more joint, in-depth monitoring and research activities on the ground; improving local social and economic infrastructure; enhancing law enforcement systems, in particular at local levels; and providing concrete assistance to countries in implementing the ATT.

Members of the Africa-China-EU EWG presented the primary findings of their joint field-research activities that were conducted in June of this year. The research demonstrated the phenomenon of areas across the region acting as regional distribution hubs of illicit weapons, thus fuelling instability across West and East Africa. Evidence shows that weapons in conflict/post-conflict states have passed through governments' stockpiles and have been circulated freely within the region. The high possibility of diversion, explosion, and inefficient management caused by unsecured stockpiles needs to be addressed urgently. It was strongly recommended that a thorough assessment of existing stockpiles, storage conditions, and accounting takes place; measures such as construction of appropriate storage facilities, security measures, staff training, disposal, and inventory management will need to be taken into account; and arms management legislation, regulations, and appropriate oversight mechanisms should be developed.

Apart from adequate stockpile management, issues relating to reliable marking of SALW, effective record keeping of firearms, corruption of security forces, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration projects, and alternative livelihoods were also mentioned.

## Putting the ATT into practice

The ATT, the first international treaty of its kind, attempts to establish common standards for the legal and legitimate trade in conventional arms and obliges all State parties to adapt their national controls to such standards. Since the Treaty was opened for signature on 3 June, the international momentum to bring the Treaty into force has been very encouraging. At time of writing, 115 States had signed and eight States had ratified the Treaty, and it is hoped that the Treaty will enter into force by the autumn/fall of 2014.

Although there are various concerns about weaknesses in the Treaty, in the form of gaps and ambiguities, there is a strong political will among a large number of states to work towards an effective and rigorous implementation of the ATT. The latest UN resolution on the ATT (A/RES/68/31) was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 5 December by a recorded vote of 152 in favour to none against, with 29 abstentions. So far, all EU member states have signed the Treaty; over 50 per cent of African states have signed the Treaty, and one has ratified;

China appears to be considering the possibility of signing the Treaty.

In concrete terms, the ATT is a commitment of responsibility by State Parties to exercise controls and be morally, politically, and legally accountable for the commitments they make. This requires State Parties to promote universalisation and take cooperative action when possible. States should also be willing to engage with parliaments, as well as external stakeholders including industry, and civil society organisations.

In addition, participants called for wide international cooperation to learn about advanced management and mitigation measures relating to the conventional arms trade, and to exchange experiences on monitoring end use/end users on the ground, as well as to share information on risk areas.

## Continuing dialogue

Although much of the flow of weapons to illicit markets results from inadequate stockpile security management, or is enabled by local governments, external actors have a responsibility to support tackling the overwhelming problems of illicit weapons and inadequately regulated weapons in East Africa, since the great majority of weapons there come originally from outside the region.

The significance of the ATT and the many political and legal agreements that are already in place was highlighted in the discussion; the key issue is to apply these agreements and put them into practice. It is crucial to have a shared understanding of what the real problems are, to learn lessons from actions, to identify priorities, and to focus on what needs to be done in order to allow effective cooperation among countries and other stakeholders, and also external actors such as the EU and China.

The seminar was followed by the fourth meeting of the Africa-China-EU EWG on conventional arms on 14 November. A briefing on recent activities and plans for the coming months was followed by an active and engaging discussion on the next phase of the project. Numerous participants voiced their firm support for the work and the achievement of the EWG and reiterated the importance of a sustained project building on what has been achieved and turning it into long-term progress on the ground. A number of different initiatives and forms of potential future cooperation were shared. It was agreed that a long-term strategy needed to be developed for the project and the Africa-China-EU EWG.

For more information on the seminar, please contact Bernardo Mariani, Saferworld's Head of China Programme, at: [bmariani@saferworld.org.uk](mailto:bmariani@saferworld.org.uk)

## List of participants - speakers are listed in bold.

**Amb (rtd) Adala, Ochieng, Acting Executive Director, Africa Peace Forum, and Member of the Africa-China-EU Expert Working Group (EWG) on Conventional Arms**

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Col Baud, Jacques F., Arms Control & Coordination Section (ACCS), Political Affairs & Security Policy Division (PASP), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

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## About Saferworld

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with local people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. Our priority is people – we believe that everyone should be able to lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from insecurity and violent conflict.

We are a not-for-profit organisation with programmes in nearly 20 countries and territories across Africa, Asia and Europe.

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