



General Assembly

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First Committee – Disarmament and International Security

This committee aims to create a more peaceful world. Talks in this committee center around reducing weapons in the world. It also identifies threats to peace and find solutions to international security.

This committee believes the world can become stable through cooperation. Countries can protect their people better if they work together for peace. For example, this committee might discuss how to keep weapons from terrorists. Or, how less weapons can make the world safer. Also, countries talk about policing weapons and finding ways to reduce the weapons they have.

First Committee works closely with **United Nations Disarmament Commission** and **Conference on Disarmament**. They have passed resolutions on ammunition, military spending and missiles.

Agenda Item 98.T – General and complete disarmament: The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects

Background

Small arms and light weapons are hand guns, pistols, sub-machine guns, mortars, landmines and light missiles. Basically, they are any weapon that can be transported by one person. 90% of all civilian deaths or injuries are because of these types of weapons. Every year up to 500 000 people die due to them. They also make conflicts last longer and make rebuilding after a conflict difficult. Since these weapons are easily hidden they remain available to people long after a conflict has ended. If violence breaks out the weapons escalate the fighting. They make it easier to continue the cycle of violence.

Most small arms last for a very long time. Some weapons might still be usable after 100 years. This is a big problem because the weapons do not disappear after a certain amount of time. Because they are not destroyed the weapons just keep building up until there are more and more of them. This does not happen quickly - it happens over decades as violence continues or gets worse. As long as there is ammunition, weapons have the ability to kill and injure people.

During the Cold War (1947-1991) many countries made weapons and sent them to the countries who were their allies. The Soviet Union sent small arms to other communist countries. The US sent weapons to capitalist countries. In the Vietnam War, communist countries sold weapons to North Vietnam to use against the US. The US sold small arms and missiles to Afghanistan to fight the Soviet Union. After the Soviet Union was defeated, the Taliban used those weapons to take over the country and terrorize the population. Less than 20 years later those same weapons were used against American soldiers invading the country.

Every *illegal* weapon started out as a *legal* weapon. Companies are allowed to sell weapons but they must follow national and international law. Sometimes companies, or countries, illegally buy or sell weapons. Other times, weapons are stolen and end up in the hands of criminals or terrorists. There is also what is known as the “Ant Trade”. This is the buying and selling of small amounts of arms. Some of these weapons were stolen and some were legal but end up in the hands of criminals. Many illegal weapons are bought and sold this way. The individual numbers may be small but over time this results in huge amounts of weapons. These weapons often end up in the hands of criminals.

Some people do not think that weapon sales should be controlled by the government. These people see small arms as a tool to protect themselves and their family. Many are afraid the government will take away their weapons and not protect them from violence. For example, in the Central African Republic some people arm themselves and create self-defense groups to protect themselves from criminal gangs. Other people do not trust the government. Sudan and Syria are two countries that have been accused of killing their own citizens. If a person cannot trust his or her government, how should they protect themselves from violence?

In the United States the Second Amendment gives people the right to own a weapon. The National Rifle Association (NRA) and other similar organizations work to protect this right. Sometimes these groups will speak out against the work of the United Nations when it makes suggestions on how the sale of guns can be safer. Guatemala and Mexico both include the right to “bear arms” in their Constitution like the United States.

In other countries gun culture is a problem. Although guns may be controlled by the government, the culture of the country glorifies or encourages the use of guns. In Lebanon people off shoot guns up into the sky to celebrate. This kills several people every year. In Pakistan’s north-western area it is not uncommon to see people openly carrying guns. The Philippines, Serbia, and Yemen all have gun cultures which normalize the use of guns. In Switzerland, all men must join the military. From the age of 20-30 they can be called to defend their country at any time. Therefore, every young man has a gun in his home. Some people choose to own illegal guns because it makes them feel safer or it has become part of their culture.

The largest exporters of small arms are the United States, Italy, Germany, Brazil, Austria, Switzerland, Israel, Russia, South Korea, Belgium, China, Turkey, Spain, and the Czech Republic. Each of these countries sells at least US\$100 million yearly. The countries who import the most small arms are the US, Canada Germany, Australia, Thailand, United Kingdom, France and Italy. Each of these countries imports at least US\$100 million yearly.

Just because a country imports or exports weapons does not mean it will have a lot of violence or that the weapons will be misused. However, not all countries keep track of what happens to these weapons after they are bought or sold. They can end up stolen, lost, or sold to people who should not have them. For example, many guns the police in Mexico find in the hands of criminals were originally bought legally in the US. Half of the guns they cannot trace.

Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals is Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. It encourages countries to work together to stop the spread of small arms and light weapons. One of the targets is to reduce the flow of illegal weapons and stop organized crime. It would like countries to keep track of the number of weapons seized.

Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (UNPoA)

This programme was agreed to in July 2001. It seeks to encourage countries to create stricter national laws in order to stop the sale of illegal guns. Countries should control the export, and import of weapons as well as the transport and re-selling of weapons. Countries should also work to stop people involved in the illegal sale of small arms and weapons. They should be arrested and brought to court. Every weapon should have an identifying mark so that law enforcement can tell where a weapon came from.

International Tracing Instrument (ITI)

This agreement was accepted in 2005. It is part of the Programme of Action. States promised to make sure weapons are marked and that records are kept about the weapons. This helps control the flow of weapons. Also, if weapons are used in a crime the police can find out where the weapon came from. In 2015, tracing weapons became one of the targets of Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)

The Arms Trade Treaty was adopted on the 2nd of April 2013 and came into force on the 24th of December 2014. 91 states are parties to the treaty and 130 countries are signatories. It asks countries not to send weapons to countries that the Security Council has determined has committed human rights abuses. It also asks countries to be open about their weapon sales and to report on their import and export of weapons. This treaty covers all weapons including tanks, missiles, warships, small arms and light weapons.

By the Numbers: Small Arms and Light Weapons



African countries experienced conflict since 2000



Of companies around the world make small arms



Value of the arms trade each year.



Increase in the global arms trade in the last 10 years



People die every year from armed violence.



Small arms and light weapons around the world.

Guiding Questions

1. Is your country involved in any conflicts at this time? What is your country's most recent conflict?
2. Is your country an importer or exporter of small arms and light weapons? For what purpose does it import these weapons?
3. What are the gun laws in your country? Are these laws similar to the laws of your neighbours? Why might countries want neighbouring countries to have similar gun control laws?
4. Has your country signed the Arms Trade Treaty? Why might it agree or disagree with this treaty?
5. Does your country have a problem with violence? What could be done to lessen the amount of violence in your country?
6. Small Arms and light weapons are especially a problem in the African continent. They do not have a large number of weapons but the weapons in Africa keep being used to cause conflict and violence. How can this cycle of violence be stopped?
7. How can people living in dangerous areas feel safe?
8. Does the problem exist in your community?
9. Who is working on it? NGOs, not for profits, other groups or individuals?
10. Knowing about this problem, how does it impact your world view?
11. How could you make an impact on this issue through your life choices?

Resources

Title	Hyperlink	How is it helpful?
<i>United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs</i>	http://www.un.org/disarmament/	Provides broad information about disarmament.
<i>Small Arms and Light Weapons</i>	http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/resources/fact-sheets/critical-issues/5450-small-arms-and-light-weapons-salw	Gives an overview of the problem.
<i>International Action Network on Small Arms</i>	http://www.iansa.org/home	Over 700 groups working together to end gun violence.
<i>Interactive Maps and Charts of Armed Violence Indicators</i>	http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/tools/interactive-map-charts-on-armed-violence.html	A visual representation of violent deaths by country by Small Arms Survey.
<i>Responsible Regulation of Global Arms Transfers</i>	http://www.saferworld.org.uk/arms-transfers/transfer-of-conventional-weapons	Saferworld gives an overview of the issue and looks at what can be done to decrease the violence.
<i>Inside the Ant Trade</i>	http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/12010458/Inside-the-Ant-Trade-how-Europes-terrorists-get-their-guns.html	A Telegraph article about the illegal transfer of weapons in Europe.
<i>The Checkered History of American Weapons Deals</i>	http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/arming-the-middle-east-the-checkered-history-of-american-weapons-deals-a-498421.html	A look at some of the countries the US has given weapons to and how those weapons were used.
<i>In Mexico Tens of Thousands of Guns Come from the US</i>	http://www.npr.org/sections/thewo-way/2016/01/12/462781469/in-mexico-tens-of-thousands-of-illegal-guns-come-from-the-u-s	NPR article how guns from the US end up in Mexico.
<i>Somalia – Where the Guns Rule</i>	http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4076011.stm	BBC article about how guns are used in everyday situation in Somalia.