



**United Nations Office
for Disarmament Affairs**

**Remarks for the Open Debate of the United Nations Security Council on
Small Arms and Light Weapons**

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As delivered



10 November 2025
New York

Mr. President,

Distinguished Members of the Security Council,

Good morning. Let me begin by thanking Sierra Leone for convening the Open Debate. It is my pleasure to brief the Council on the Secretary-General's biennial report on small arms and light weapons, contained in document S/2025/670, on behalf of the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu.

Since the Council was last briefed on this matter two years ago, we have witnessed both progress as well as persisting challenges associated with small arms and light weapons. Let me start with the positive developments: **Member States have taken significant steps to strengthen our global instruments.**

A landmark development was the adoption of the Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management in 2023, addressing a long-standing gap in international efforts to prevent the diversion of ammunition and mitigate the risks of unplanned explosions at munition sites.

In 2024, States reaffirmed their commitment to combating the illicit manufacturing and trafficking of these weapons at the Fourth Review Conference on the Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons and set the course forward. The Conference established an open-ended technical expert group to examine developments in technologies and design of small arms and light weapons: an important step in ensuring our frameworks remain fit for purpose in light of the ever-evolving technological innovations.

The implementation of this universal instrument, alongside others such as the Arms Trade Treaty and the Firearms Protocol, represents a critical foundation for preventing diversion and misuse of small arms and light weapons.

At the regional level, we have also seen strengthened cooperation - notably, through the adoption of the Central America and Dominican Republic Roadmap on Small Arms and Light Weapons, and the continued implementation of the Western Balkans Roadmap, the Caribbean Firearms Roadmap, the action plan for the implementation of the ECOWAS Declaration on small arms, the African Union's Silencing the Guns initiative and other efforts.

However, despite these important advances, significant implementation challenges remain.

More than one billion firearms are in circulation globally. Their continued proliferation is both a symptom and a driver of the multiple crises that our world is facing. **Their widespread availability underscores the urgent need to address the consequences of illicit small arms and light weapons, which are far-reaching.**

Allow me to highlight three areas of critical impact, which have a cascading effect:

First, the illicit trade and misuse of small arms and light weapons fuels armed violence, terrorism and organized crime.

Indeed, the Secretary-General's report, which we are discussing today, documents persistent violations of arms embargoes in contexts such as Libya, Yemen, and Haiti, where diverted weapons are arming criminal groups and terrorist networks. These are facilitated by poorly manned borders, and increasingly by illicit digital activities. Even in countries where arms embargoes have been partially lifted or lifted, such as the Central African Republic and Somalia, diversion risks persist.

More broadly however, weapons diverted from national stockpiles – or at any point throughout the supply chain – could end up in the hands of non-State armed groups.

In parallel, we are witnessing a rise in illicitly manufactured and craft-produced guns. More 3D-printed small arms are available in illicit markets, especially in countries across Western Europe, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

In the Caribbean, CARICOM declared crime and violence a public health issue as firearms trafficking reached crisis levels. In Haiti, criminal groups expanded their territorial control using trafficked weapons to challenge state authority and deepen insecurity.

In Africa, illicit flows of small arms and light weapons in West Africa, the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and the Great Lakes region contribute to a systemic crisis, transforming localized violence into even more complex cross-border conflicts. As the AU High Representative for Disarmament Affairs and my co-briefer today, Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas has rightfully pointed out at the Security Council Arria Formula meeting on small arms and light weapons in March, also convened by Sierra Leone, this crisis is not only an issue of weak supply chains but also a symptom of deep-seated governance deficits. Weak public safety mechanisms and limited state capacity are prompting communities to arm themselves for protection, further fuelling insecurity.

While small arms may be intended for civilian protection and self-defence in most countries, they too often become instruments of human suffering when used without effective control.

Indeed, the second impact I wish to underscore is the devastating human cost of small arms.

In 2024 alone, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights recorded at least **48,000 conflict-related civilian deaths** – representing a 40 percent increase from the previous year. In certain conflict areas, small arms were responsible for up to 30 percent of civilian deaths. Meanwhile, between 2022 and 2024, **88 percent of documented cases of conflict-related sexual violence** involved the use of firearms.

These abuses are preventable. But prevention requires targeted investments and sustained and coordinated action.

That leads me to the third impact I wish to highlight: the socio-economic toll of small arms proliferation.

Small arms violence disrupts education and healthcare systems and, more broadly, undermines sustainable development. This connection was acknowledged at the first-ever joint meeting of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly on small arms and light weapons earlier this year. At that meeting, both Presidents of ECOSOC and General Assembly also highlighted the rising global costs of conflict and military expenditures as a critical concern.

To illustrate the scale of this concern: in 2023, the combined revenue of the world's 100 largest arms companies amounted to \$632 billion. In 2024, **global military expenditure had surged to \$2.7 trillion** dollars, representing a 37 percent increase since 2015. The Secretary-General's report titled "*The Security We Need: Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future*", issued in response to the Pact for the Future, is a call to action. It urges the international community to rethink priorities and rebalance global investments toward the kind of multidimensional security the world truly needs.

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While the impacts of illicit small arms and light weapons are profound, the Secretary-General has suggested some concrete actions to, collectively and respectively, turn the tide.

First, we must prioritize **comprehensive weapons and ammunition management across the entire life cycle** of weapons - from the point of manufacture, transfer, transport, retransfer, stockpiling, to their eventual use or disposal.

States are encouraged to strengthen national capacities and share good practices with each other for **secure stockpile management, enhanced marking and tracing systems, recovery of obliterated marking on weapons, and enhanced border and maritime controls.**

Innovative technologies for marking and tracing – such as the use of chemical taggants for ammunition - offer promising tools to deter diversion and support investigations. Effective tracing is also essential for monitoring compliance with **arms embargoes**. In this regard, the Secretary General urges Member States to actively support the work of United Nations expert panels by responding promptly to tracing requests and granting access to seized weapons and ammunition for inspection.

Beyond sanctions regimes, the **Security Council has a central role to play in ensuring effective weapons and ammunition management**. I urge the Council to systematically integrate small arms and ammunition considerations into its relevant mandates.

That includes **United Nations peace operations**, where resolution 2616 (2021) already calls for UN entities to assist States in combating illicit arms flows, as well as **during DDR processes**, where effective arms control is essential to sustainable peacebuilding.

To support this integration, my Office has developed practical tools, including the newly launched **third edition of the Aide-Memoire on Options for Weapons and Ammunition Management in Decisions of the Security Council** and an online **Dashboard**, which provide guidance for drafting of resolutions to effectively include small arms and ammunition considerations.

One area where such integration is especially critical is in policy deliberations and action plans related to both the **Women, Peace and Security** and **Youth, Peace and Security agendas**. As we mark the **25th anniversary of the Women, Peace and Security agenda**, the time has come to advance **gender-responsive arms control**. This includes confronting harmful social norms and entrenched conceptions of masculinity that perpetuate armed violence and hinder sustainable peace.

Young people - who account for **37 percent of global homicide victims annually and, in some contexts, are also involved in committing such violence** - must be meaningfully included in prevention efforts. Their voices and lived experiences are vital to shaping national action plans and community-based violence reduction strategies.

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The weapons produced and transferred today risk fuelling the illicit trade and driving the violence and instability of tomorrow.

Our responsibility, in this regard, is clear: **we must prevent the diversion and illicit manufacturing of small arms and light weapons, or we will face the consequences of deepening insecurity.**

Turning this responsibility into action requires practical, forward-looking initiatives, centred on international cooperation and targeted technical assistance. One such effort is the recently launched **Small Arms and Light Weapons Fellowship programme**, which builds capacities and strengthens cross-border cooperation to tackle illicit small arms and light weapons.

This initiative reflects a broader commitment to equipping Member States with the tools and partnerships needed to implement meaningful change. The **UN Office for Disarmament Affairs**, together with our partners across the UN system, stands ready to support Member States in implementing effective, inclusive and sustainable arms control strategies.

I thank you.
