

PoA Prep Com: Final Thoughts and Moving Forward, Katherine Prizeman

As the Preparatory Committee (Prep Com) for the second Review Conference for reviewing the progress made on the implementation of the Programme of Action on small arms (PoA) has come to a close, member states are prepared to meet again in August to take a more detailed look at the successes and failures related to combating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons (SALWs). The small arms process is a critical forum for discussing the many human security-related implications of the proliferation of illicit arms as well as the diversion of arms from legal sales. Small arms are indeed an issue to be dealt with in multiple security discussions from sexual and gender-based violence in armed conflict to the commission of mass atrocity crimes. Therefore, regular and transparent reviews of the PoA are a vital component of improving security on the national, regional, and international levels.

The second Review Conference for the PoA to be held in August is based on a universally-accepted General Assembly resolution (66/47), thus granting the process a healthy degree of credibility and consensus. Although controversies exist around expansion of the PoA, such as granting it a legally-binding status and expanding its scope to include ammunition, there is little argument that the PoA's provisions, if adopted according to national needs and conducive to individual challenges, can and will prevent the illicit trade in SALWs and its dire consequences for international peace and security. Successful implementation of the PoA, as it is not legally-binding and puts forth a comprehensive blueprint of national, regional, and international measures to combat illicit small arms trade, requires robust trust and capacity building among member states and other relevant stakeholders such that national implementers have sufficient capacity and investment levels to adopt these measures.

This week's Prep Com provided member states with the opportunity to adopt rules of procedure and an agenda as well as hold an exchange of views, in light of the time constraints of just five days, on potential elements for discussion in August. Substantive discussion was focused in large part on the need for more robust and comprehensive international assistance and cooperation for full implementation of the PoA. Additionally, member states addressed the follow-up mechanisms of the PoA, in particular the role of future meetings such as Meetings of Governmental Experts (MGE) on technical implementation capacities such as marking, tracing, recordkeeping, and activities around border controls. However, as noted by several delegations during the week, the Prep Com and subsequent Review Conference also provide for a valuable reaffirmation of commitment to strengthening and enhancing implementation of the PoA and the fight against the scourge of illicit weapons.

A [Final Report](#) was indeed adopted, although it is entirely procedural and technical in nature. Several delegations also submitted helpful Working Papers over the course of the week that enhanced the exchange of views during the week as well as for future deliberations. These papers included one from the Non-Aligned Movement ([NAM](#)) on international assistance and cooperation, one from [Japan](#) on follow-up mechanisms, and two more comprehensive papers covering all aspects of the PoA's implementation from the [European Union](#) and [Germany](#), respectively. These Working Papers will certainly add to the bounty of documents to be used during the inter-sessional period between the Prep Com and the Review Conference as the Chair and member states hold informal consultations to determine the best way forward in more effectively implementing the PoA's provisions. Background documentation for the Review Conference will also include the Chair's summary from the MGE from May 2011, from Ambassador Jim McLay of New Zealand, representing the first of its kind. Many delegations expressed interest in more meetings of this nature to dissect in more technical terms how

implementers from capitals can better adopt the PoA's measures in practice. The [Chair's summary](#), under the authorship of Chair Ambassador Ogwu of Nigeria, laid forth views expressed by member states during the week according to the structure of the PoA itself—measures to combat illicit trade at the national, regional, and international levels; international cooperation and assistance; follow-up mechanisms to the Review Conference; and review of the International Tracing Instrument (ITI). The summary was not a consensus document, but did its best to summarize views and recommendations made by member states to improve implementation and does serve as a beneficial starting point for discussions both in informal consultations and in August's Review Conference.

In looking forward, it is important to bear in mind the significance of the PoA. The PoA directly addresses the scourge of illicit weapons and seeks to garner control over their proliferation by concrete measures including stockpile management and disposal, border control mechanisms, and firearms marking and tracing. This is an instrument, accepted by the international community on the whole, that can in fact prevent and eradicate human suffering associated with armed violence and other forms of conflict committed with SALWs, which is no small contribution to international security.

There are many aspects of the PoA that require further elaboration and information exchange among all member states to deal with this complicated and comprehensive challenge. However, there are several issues that, in our view, merit particular attention:

- Developing national action plans (NAP) on SALWs would serve as an excellent confidence-building measure, although not without its difficulties given the example found in the women, peace and security framework. Such NAPs have not been entirely successful in the context of Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325 as most states still have not formulated a NAP in the almost twelve years since the Resolution's adoption;
- Focusing on the need for peacekeeping operations to address safe storage and disposal of SALWs as part of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs;
- Discussing SALW issues in other UN frameworks and mandates including 1325, the Special Representative on children and armed conflict, and the Special Representative on conflict-related sexual violence, among others;
- Setting up and institutionalizing other MGEs in the PoA small arms process such that there are regular gatherings of national, technical experts directly responsible for implementing the PoA's provisions;
- Identifying which of the PoA/ITI commitments will require further elaboration in a diplomatic setting and setting up meetings and agendas to address them in the appropriate forum

The Prep Com offered much hope for addressing the deadly consequences of illicit SALWs. It accomplished its procedural goals as well as initiated a substantive discussion that, although will require much more diplomatic wrangling in order to identify points of viable consensus, was wrought with important security themes. Diplomats and non-governmental stakeholders alike must use the inter-sessional period to prepare in the best way possible for the Review Conference by vetting proposals already presented as well as formulating new ones.