



RENEWING COMMITMENTS ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS ISSUES

The UN PoA at 20: Reviewing the United Nations' Small Arms and Light Weapons Agenda

2 June 2021 | 1:15 – 2:15pm EST | Virtual Public Event

On 2 June 2021, the Stimson Center and Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations, New York, co-hosted a high-level seminar to review the varied concerns raised by easy access to and proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW). The event featured a discussion among government representatives, UN officials, and civil society experts on opportunities and challenges to address SALW issues and included remarks from:

- **H.E. Mr. Kimihiro Ishikane**, Permanent Representative of Japan
- **H.E. Mr. Martin Kimani**, Permanent Representative of Kenya
(Represented by H.E. Ms. Njambi Kinyungu, Deputy Permanent Representative of Kenya)
- **Izumi Nakamitsu**, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs of the UN
- **Glenn McDonald**, Senior Researcher of Small Arms Survey
- **Rachel Stohl**, Vice President at the Stimson Center

The event opened with a discussion about the enduring challenges posed by SALW to international peace and security. Ms. Rachel Stohl from the Stimson Center underscored the lethal legacy of SALW in conflicts around the world and highlighted the role of the international community in mitigating harm associated with their transfer and use. SALW appeal to and are used by governments and non-state actors for a variety of reasons – including their low cost, wide availability, and easy portability, as well as the fact that they are concealable, simple to use, and can last a long time – and the consequences of SALW proliferation and use can impact countries and communities long after the guns fall silent. Such consequences include straining medical systems due to weapons-related injuries, disrupting educational opportunities, hindering access to humanitarian aid, contributing to an increase in refugees and internally displaced people (IDP), facilitating cultures of violence and threats to vulnerable populations – such as children recruited as child soldiers – endangering humanitarian workers and peacekeepers, and slowing economic development. Thus, there is a need for continued action by the United Nations and others to ensure responsibility and accountability in the transfer and use of SALW.

Ambassador Kimihiro Ishikane from the Permanent Mission of Japan highlighted the risks associated with SALW proliferation and remarked on Japan's contribution to responsible SALW controls and disarmament initiatives. Nearly 20 years ago, Japan initiated a process that ultimately led to the establishment of the first UN Group of Governmental Experts on the issue of small arms and light weapons and has remained engaged on the subject in the years since. For

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example, Japan has submitted several UN General Assembly resolutions on the issue of SALW. These initiatives have paralleled Japan's efforts to provide and coordinate assistance – with a particular emphasis on post-conflict situations – to countries affected by armed violence and SALW proliferation and use, such as through weapons collection and disposal, mine clearance, contributions to the "Saving Lives Entity," or SALIENT, Fund, and supporting the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (UN PoA) and relevant Sustainable Development Goals, among other efforts.

Ambassador Njambi Kinyungu, the Deputy Permanent Representative of Kenya, delivered remarks on behalf of Ambassador Martin Kimani, Permanent Representative of Kenya and the chair of the 7th Biennial Meeting of States (BMS7) on the UN PoA. She discussed why Kenya is engaged in the SALW issue and the chair's expectations for BMS7. The remarks highlighted the need for collaborative work and a spirit of compromise among countries participating in BMS7 in advance and during the meeting, particularly in light of the ongoing challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. With regard to Kenya's engagement in SALW issues, Kenya prioritizes the prevention, combatting, and eradication of illicit small arms and has established a national focal point on SALW to coordinate initiatives and actions on arms control and management. Kenya has also implemented several activities to advance SALW controls, including by playing an active role in the establishment and financing of the Regional Center on Small Arms (RECSA); supporting efforts to enhance security and storage of SALW and increase arms marking and tracing; contributing to weapons destruction and banning illicit SALW; collecting illicit SALW through voluntary surrender campaigns and disarmament initiatives; and supporting public sensitization campaigns pursuant to the African Union's "Silencing the Guns" initiative. As a member of the UN Security Council, Kenya is also seeking all opportunities to advance the Security Council's efforts on SALW issues.

Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs of the UN, remarked on the importance of sustained attention to and engagement with SALW issues as a means to save lives. SALW remains a priority issue because SALW represent the category of weapons that kill and injure the most people around the world. Furthermore, the number of SALW in circulation has increased dramatically over the last 20 years and these weapons continue to impact the lives and livelihoods of people around the world. While several efforts and initiatives have been developed in the last two decades to address the issue of SALW, the problems related to SALW proliferation have been resilient and their consequences on human lives remain staggering. The occasion of the 7th Biennial Meeting of States on the UN Programme of Action (UN PoA) in July 2021 provides an opportunity to draw renewed attention to the costs and consequences of SALW proliferation and to identify durable solutions at the national, regional, and international levels. Bottom-up strategies can better address the threats and risks posed by irresponsible or illegal SALW transfers and use and help strengthen linkages across the international community to peace, security, and development in pursuit, ultimately, of human security in the long term.

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Mr. Glenn McDonald from the Small Arms Survey offered perspectives on 20 years of UN PoA implementation and steps that countries and the global community can take now and into the future to address the enduring challenges posed by SALW proliferation. Mr. McDonald noted that, unfortunately, it remains incredibly difficult to provide an accurate global picture of UN PoA implementation after 20 years, in part because there is no practical PoA monitoring mechanism. The lack of such a mechanism stifles the ability to review progress made in UN PoA implementation at review conferences and among countries, the United Nations, and civil society. Given these challenges, however, there are several issue areas that have increased in prominence within the international community. One such issue is the risk of weapons diversion and the importance of conflict tracing to better identify the sources and mechanisms of illicit arms flows. Another issue is the importance of diversity in disarmament work, including through greater recruitment of women in small arms programming. The global community has also sharpened its focus, over the last 20 years, on how SALW issues affect specific regions and countries. These aspects highlight the interconnected nature of SALW proliferation and underscore the continued need for multilateral, multi-stakeholder cooperation to support UN PoA implementation and address SALW concerns.

Following remarks from the speakers, the panelists and event participants engaged in a question-and-answer session in which event participants asked about Japan's plans to address SALW issues in the future, the role of UN Human Rights Council expert panels in addressing concerns raised by the transfer and use of SALW, how to assist the BMS process in supporting concrete commitments to global change where action is required on SALW issues, and on the impact and threat posed by newer technologies such as 3D-printed weapons.

In response to questions, Japan noted that it is focusing on three key areas for addressing SALW in the future: awareness-raising and momentum building through the UNGA; capacity building on the ground, such as through the SALIENT pilot; and supporting relevant multilateral bodies and instruments. With regard to the potential role of the UN Human Rights Council in addressing SALW concerns, panelists highlighted the utility of secondary sanctions, when applicable, and the possibility of building the capacity of UN peace operations to conduct tracing and support efforts to better understand the dynamics of illicit arms flows. On how to invigorate the BMS process, panelists remarked on the need to bring more expertise into the process to provide insights on current challenges as well as potential solutions, and the prospect of voluntary national target setting as one means to generate new momentum and creativity in the BMS. And on the threat posed by 3D printing, panelists cautioned that the risk is very real, particularly as groups around the world have found ways to produce reliable weapons cheaply and easily using a combination of traditional and 3D-printed parts. In this way, 3D printing may help those who want to circumvent existing restrictions.

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The event concluded with remarks from Ambassador Ishikane, who underscored the continued relevance of SALW issues today and expressed his hopes that BMS7 will pick up on many of the points discussed throughout the panel. SALW issues are not an independent issue, but rather have an impact on society, gender, humanity, politics, and more. Therefore, it is important that the international community pursue a wholistic approach to SALW concerns that places people's safety and security at the center of all efforts.