

Background

As part of the project Improving the Effectiveness of the PoA: Implementation Challenges and Opportunities, UNIDIR hosted a workshop on 3 December 2010 to discuss implementation challenges and opportunities with respect to the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms (PoA).

UNIDIR invited 20 experts to attend the workshop, including diplomats, civil society representatives, representatives of regional organizations and national focal points.

The workshop was conducted on an informal basis and consisted of four sessions:

Session 1: Introduction

This session included an introduction to the project and an overview of the initial findings.

Session 2: Regional perspectives—Africa and the Middle East

This session included presentations from civil society and a representative from the League of Arab States on the implementation challenges facing Africa and the Middle East, respectively.

Session 3: Regional perspectives—the Americas and Europe

This session included presentations from civil society and a national focal point on the implementation challenges facing the Americas and Europe, respectively.

Session 4: The way forward/next steps

This session included presentations from civil society as well as New Zealand (as chair of the Open-ended Meeting of Governmental Experts in May 2011) and the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs regarding next steps in the process and the future of implementation considerations.

Findings and outcomes

Defining the concept of “implementation challenges”

Participants discussed and explored the difference between:

Reporting challenges—challenges and obstacles states face with respect to submitting quality reports or reports at all, as well as limitations in the reporting process. The challenges and obstacles identified included:

- lack of interagency or intersectoral communication and information sharing;
- staff turnover and lack of institutional memory, making it difficult to submit comprehensive reports; and
- the inevitable gap between reality and what states report, which is a weakness in all processes involving a reporting mechanism, not just the PoA.

Small arms challenges—the nature of the small arms and light weapons (SALW) problem that states face in their country or region as distinct from the challenges they face implementing their PoA commitments.

Implementation challenges—the challenges and obstacles states face with respect to implementing the PoA commitments effectively or at all.

Identifying implementation challenges

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED IN NATIONAL REPORTS

The following implementation challenges were specifically identified by states in their national reports:

- lack of capacity and resources (financial, technical, equipment, education and training);
- lack of information and awareness (nature and scale of the SALW problem);
- regional considerations (lack of regional mechanism/framework, need for harmonization of laws);
- legislation and institutional frameworks (inadequate or outdated laws, weak national institutions); and
- context and geography (long or porous borders, ongoing conflicts).

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES DERIVED FROM MAPPING EXERCISE

UNIDIR conducted a mapping exercise, which involved recording the frequency with which states addressed or mentioned in their national reports specific themes and commitments in the PoA. The following implementation challenges were not specifically nominated or identified by states in their national reports, but were derived from the mapping exercise:

- lack clarity in PoA language;
- lack of understanding of PoA commitments;
- poor knowledge management on SALW issues and a lack of institutional memory (e.g. due to high turnover in government staff);
- absence of bench marks and best practices (imprecise and ambiguous commitments);
- lack of political will and competing priorities; and

- perceptions that SALW are not a problem (or that certain themes or commitments are not relevant).

These initial findings on implementation challenges were presented to participants and formed the basis of discussions.

OTHER CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED BY WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

In addition to the above challenges, workshop participants identified and discussed the following challenges to PoA implementation and the process as a whole:

- nature of the instrument—non-comprehensive nature of the PoA; participants emphasized that the fact that the PoA is a politically and not legally binding instrument remains an obstacle;
- measurability—approaches to measuring PoA implementation and impact; self-identification or self-assessment versus independent or external assessment; the political nature of assessment and sensitivities to external evaluation; and
- process-related issues—role of civil society beyond mere awareness-raising towards assessment; consensus approach.

Next steps

The aim of this summary report is to capture the main points raised during the workshop deliberations on 3 December 2010. The findings and discussion points raised during the workshop are expanded on and further explored in the final report prepared by UNIDIR on implementation challenges. The aim of the workshop was to highlight and discuss implementation challenges, and brainstorm the issues generally. As it was not the aim of the workshop to reach consensus or agreement with respect to implementation challenges and how to overcome them, no attempt has been made to identify recommendations arising from the workshop. Nevertheless, some of the suggestions and recommendations made during the workshop are reflected in the final report, though no attribution will be made.

UNIDIR RESOURCES

About UNIDIR

The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR)—an autonomous institute within the United Nations—conducts research on disarmament and security. UNIDIR is based in Geneva, Switzerland, the centre for bilateral and multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation negotiations, and home of the Conference on Disarmament. The Institute explores current issues pertaining to the variety of existing and future armaments, as well as global diplomacy and local tensions and conflicts. Working with researchers, diplomats, government officials, NGOs and other institutions since 1980, UNIDIR acts as a bridge between the research community and governments. UNIDIR's activities are funded by contributions from governments and donor foundations.