

Workshop on Combating Illicit Trade in Weapons and Materials

On 6 April 2011, the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP) hosted an international workshop on the topic: “Reinforcing Disarmament: Combating Illicit Trade in Weapons and Materials – Regional Challenges”. This event was jointly organized with the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) and the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) with the support of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. It was attended by some 40 participants (academics and researchers, government officials, military officers, representatives of civil society organizations) from various regions, including some 15 participants from Africa.

This workshop was the second one on this topic convened by the same institutions, after the one which took place on 1-2 February 2010. It addressed some inter-related aspects of the illicit arms trade issue: the need for acquiring and managing reliable information, the requirement for effective legal and law-enforcement systems, and the challenge of implementing and operationalizing the existing legal and political instruments. The experts and participants highlighted the main difficulties in those areas: coping with insufficient resources, especially in developing countries and conflict-torn regions; matching the needs of developing countries and the assistance offer by donor countries; and improving coordination between national, regional, and international actors. They also discussed how to better integrate the fight against the illicit arms trade into a holistic approach, including security sector reform, transnational organized crime; export control and non-proliferation regimes, etc. In Africa, social inclusion is seen as a remedy against desperate youth and marginalized parts of a nation’s population that otherwise would be dragged in the trafficking business. Participants also described and compared experiences in various regional initiatives, principally in Latin America and in the African sub-regions or at the level of the African Union. Most of the discussion focused on small arms and light weapons (SALW) but also covered trafficking in radioactive and nuclear materials.

One of the purposes of this series of workshops was to identify and develop possible synergies between the various regimes already in place or to be developed, in particular by an Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). Several recommendations in this respect were formulated, such as:

- Including into the ATT a reference to the existing legally and politically binding instruments such as the International Tracing Instrument;
- Appointing national points of contacts dealing with the various instruments;
- Increasing the response to information requests within international or judiciary cooperation mechanisms;
- Promoting, through awareness efforts and training, better coordination between national security agencies, including customs, with regard to investigations on firearms used in criminal activities;
- Allowing civil society organizations, thanks to proper capacity building, to play an active role in advocacy and the fight against corruption and share information in order to complement and support the action of government agencies;
- Making better use of and contributing to existing data bases such as the ones maintained by INTERPOL, the IAEA, or UNODC;
- Considering some methods used by UNODC and other organizations to promote compliance with existing commitments, such as peer review or self-assessment.