

The role and impact of regional level action within UN processes In the fields of peace, security and disarmament

Xiaoyu Wang

Senior Political Affairs Officer, UN Office for Disarmament Affairs
UNIDIR Seminar “Towards the ATT Negotiation: Commonalities of Common Positions”
(New York 14 February 2012)

1. The impact of regional action in the fields of disarmament and non-proliferation

Experience demonstrates that disarmament initiatives at the global and regional levels are complimentary to each other and mutually reinforcing. To be effective, global norms and instruments must be implemented at regional, sub-regional and national levels. Through regional actions, global instruments and norms can make a difference on the ground. On the other hand, initiatives and actions at the regional and sub-regional levels can help build momentum to disarmament initiatives at the global level. In other words, regional actions can play an important role in shaping the global disarmament agenda and promote consensus at the global level.

The nuclear weapon-free zones established in various regions are the best examples of regional actions in promoting a nuclear-weapon-free world. Earlier, the paper presented by Elli on regional/subregional common positions on ATT manifests the concrete and valuable contribution that regional initiatives can make to a key global instrument both at the level of political momentum and specific components/elements for such a treaty.

2. The important role regional organisations play in peace, security and disarmament and the partnership between the ROs and the UN

Chapter VIII of the United Nations recognizes the key role that regional arrangements play in matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security. In recent years, the importance of this role and of the partnership between the UN and the regional organizations has grown. In 2010, the UN Security Council held a meeting devoted to strengthening the coordination and cooperation between the UN and regional organizations in the fields of peace and security. In the Presidential Statement issued after the meeting, the Security Council “underlines the importance of utilizing the existing and potential capabilities of regional and subregional organizations in this regard” and “underscores the importance of developing effective partnerships between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations”. (S/PRST/2010/1).

In this regard, there exist a number of mechanisms aimed at enhancing coordination and cooperation between the UN and ROs. The Secretary-General meets regularly with Heads of Regional and other Organizations, i. e. the high-level retreat convened by Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon in January 2010, which allowed the leaders of these organizations to establish a less formal and more personal interaction with a view

to enhancing cooperation among them. The UN Secretariat has regular bilateral meetings, at both policy and operational levels, with regional organizations to strengthen coordination and cooperation in all priority issues. The UN Secretariat has also assist ROs in building their capacity in playing a more robust role in regional peace and conflict prevention. UN stands ready to help bolster the capacity of regional organizations in tackling various challenges facing their regions in areas of peace and disarmament.

With their geographic location and regional knowledge and expertise, as well as confidence of their own member States, regional and subregional organizations are best placed to engage with States and other parties concerned in efforts to seek solutions to the challenges facing Member States in their respective regions. They are the crucial link in translating global instruments into regional and national actions, as well as in formulating regional initiatives leading to the development of global norms.

On ATT, the regional and subregional organizations certainly played a central role in achieving regional/subregional common positions.

3. Actions by the UN Regional Centres for Peace and Disarmament and their partnership with regional/subregional organizations

As the operational arm of UNODA, the Regional Disarmament Branch (RDB) oversees three Regional Centres in Africa, Asia and Latin America, serving over 135 countries in their disarmament efforts at regional, sub-regional and national level. As the only UN regional entities specialized on disarmament, non-proliferation, arms control, the three Regional Centres, through concrete and hands-on projects, assist, upon request, States in the implementation of multilateral disarmament instruments, through capacity-building and training, technical support and legislative assistance, as well as outreach and advocacy.

In doing so, the Regional Centres partner with other stakeholders, including regional and sub-regional organizations. Such partnerships are vital for achieving synergies among the various stakeholders in their collective efforts to promote peace, security and disarmament, including through sharing information, good practices and lessons learned.

UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC) has cooperated with AU, ECOWAS, RECSA , ECCAS and other stakeholders in the region in assisting African States to address various aspects of SALW control and African nuclear-weapon-free zone. Just to mention a few concrete examples of such cooperation: the AU regional strategy on SALW, Kinshasa Convention on SALW Control in Central African and Action Plan to implement the Convention (with ECCAS), regulating of small arms and light weapons brokering in East Africa (with RECSA), harmonizing national legislation with ECOWAS Convention on SALW Control (with ECOWAS).

In order to achieve synergy and effectiveness in the implementation of UN PoA on Illicit SALW, it is important to align PoA regional action plans cycle with the global cycle of PoA review and its inter-sessional work.

UNREC also supported and facilitated the development of common positions on the ATT adopted by ECOWAS member States and by the 11 Central African States within the framework of UNSAC in cooperation with ECOWAS and ECCAS.

The UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific (UNRCPPD) continues to explore and strengthen partnership with ASEAN, PIF and SAARC in assisting member States of those organizations to address the threats posed by illicit SALW, armed violence reduction, as well as disarmament outreach and advocacy. To promote the ATT, the Regional Centre placed the issue on the agenda of the annual conferences on disarmament and non-proliferation it organized in cooperation with Member States in the region. It also co-hosted the UNIDIR ATT regional seminars held in Kathmandu.

The UN Regional Centre for Peace, disarmament and development in Latin American and Caribbean (UNLIREC) works in close cooperation with regional/suregional organizations, such as OAS, Andean Community, CARICOM and SICA to assist member States in LAC on a wide range of disarmament related issues: firearms destruction and stockpile management assistance, building the capacity of law enforcement of States in tackling illicit firearms through conducting Inter-Institutional Course on Combating Illicit Firearms Trafficking (IITC) both at subregional and national levels (best practice award on regional arms control category at a meeting of the Central American Integration System (SICA). The Centre also provided legal and technical assistance in comparative legal studies and in the creation of national firearms commissions.

All the three Regional Centres supported and contributed to the UNIDIR ATT regional workshops.

We look forward to strengthening this important partnership with ROs to better assist Member States in their efforts to address various challenges in the fields of disarmament and non-proliferation, including the conclusion of the ATT and its future implementation.

I thank you.