



UNIDIR

Meeting Summary

**Synergies in Reporting
Under Multilateral Conventional
Arms Treaties and Instruments**

**Geneva, Switzerland
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UNIDIR RESOURCES

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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.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ATT	Arms Trade Treaty
FP	Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition (Firearms Protocol)
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PoA	United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
SEESAC	The South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons
UNIDIR	United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research
UNODA	United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNROCA	United Nations Register of Conventional Arms

Executive summary

This paper provides a summary of the discussions that took place during an informal expert meeting organized by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), in partnership with the Stimson Center, in Geneva, Switzerland, on 6 December 2017. The meeting was organized as part of the UNIDIR project on synergies in reporting under multilateral conventional arms treaties and instruments, which is supported by the Governments of France, the Netherlands and Switzerland. The informal expert meeting benefited from wide cross-regional participation by 33 experts from Governments, custodian organizations and expert NGOs. The overall goal of this project is to:

- Identify and map reporting obligations and commitments for select multilateral treaties and instruments in the area of conventional arms;
- Identify synergies in sources of information and record-keeping as well as methods to reporting and national coordination; and
- Explore possible options to facilitate and strengthen reporting by States.

This meeting summary outlines the issues addressed and discussions held during the informal expert meeting. The paper consists of six sections. The first section reflects on current trends and issues related to reporting on multilateral conventional arms instruments and introduces how the UNIDIR project seeks to contribute to addressing these issues. Section two introduces synergies in reporting obligations and commitments more generally and discusses the scope, angle and audience of the research outputs of this project. The third section of the paper reflects on issues considered by the participants with regard to types and sources of information and record-keeping under multilateral conventional arms instruments. The fourth section focuses on synergies in methods of, and approaches to, reporting. It includes segments on how national coordination mechanisms can be enhanced, how information sharing among States and instruments can be incentivized, as well as on the use of templates and guidance documents.

The fifth section summarizes the discussion that took place at the informal expert meeting on opportunities to enhance reporting in the area of conventional arms. The group reflected on ways to better use submitted reports to conduct analysis on arms exports, to assist in completing related national reports and to conduct relevant national assessments. Experts also considered potential positive and negative incentives to motivate participation in reporting. Further, the group discussed possible contributions from regional and subregional reporting obligations and how synergies between different instruments can be enhanced. In addition, experts shared good practices at the national, regional and multilateral levels, such as the institutionalization of points of contact, the establishment of a “dashboard” with responsibilities and deadlines, as well as inter-agency workshops to enhance the sharing of guidance and cross-fertilization between different instruments. The sixth section of the paper summarizes the discussion and provides an outlook on avenues for potential next steps in strengthening synergies in reporting under multilateral conventional arms instruments.

Introduction

Reporting has been integrated into, and utilized in, a majority of the existing conventional arms instruments at the regional and multilateral level. Reporting plays an essential role in how States interact and share information in this field.

Reporting serves to support various objectives, including building confidence among States regarding transfers and holdings, and promoting transparency and predictability in armaments. It also serves as a compliance mechanism to strengthen implementation of arms control commitments, enables information exchange and supports the review of implementation progress. State reports for multilateral conventional arms treaties and instruments may also serve as a basis for international cooperation and assistance.

Current trends

Though reporting is recognized by States as an essential tool, a varying, yet steady decrease in submission of reports to conventional arms instruments is observable in recent years. This trend applies to both the punctuality of report submissions as well as the number of reports voluntarily submitted by States.

With regard to the punctuality of report submissions, the timely submission of reports has proven to be a challenge for many States. The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) annual reports provide a useful example in this regard. For the 2016 reporting cycle, only 31 of the 75 States parties (41%) that were due to report submitted their ATT annual reports in time for the reporting deadline on 31 May 2017¹. However, in the lead-up to the Third Conference of States Parties to the ATT (CSP3) in September 2016, 17 additional States submitted reports, increasing the share of States having submitted reports to 64%.²

Concerning the number of reports that States voluntarily submitted, a pertinent example is reporting under the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (PoA). A 2012 analysis of national reports submitted between 2002 and 2012 illustrates that most States submitted three or less reports in the ten-year period³ (see Figure 1).

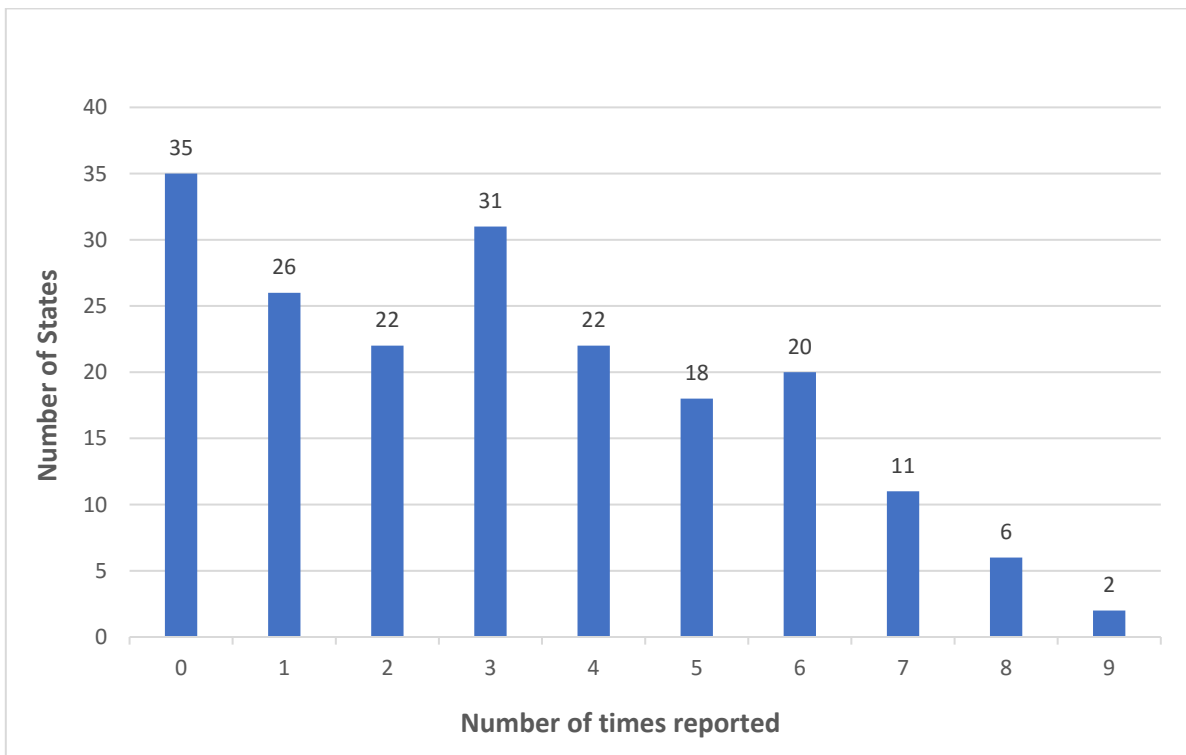
United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA) provides a relevant example in terms of an overall decline in reporting over time. Participation statistics from the UNROCA website indicate that the number of submitted reports has decreased considerably since 2006 (see Figure 2).

¹ This figure includes those who have submitted the ATT annual reports within a seven-day grace period after the reporting deadline.

² Information presented by the ATT Secretariat at the Third Review Conference of the States Parties (CSP3), 11-15 September 2017, Geneva, Switzerland.

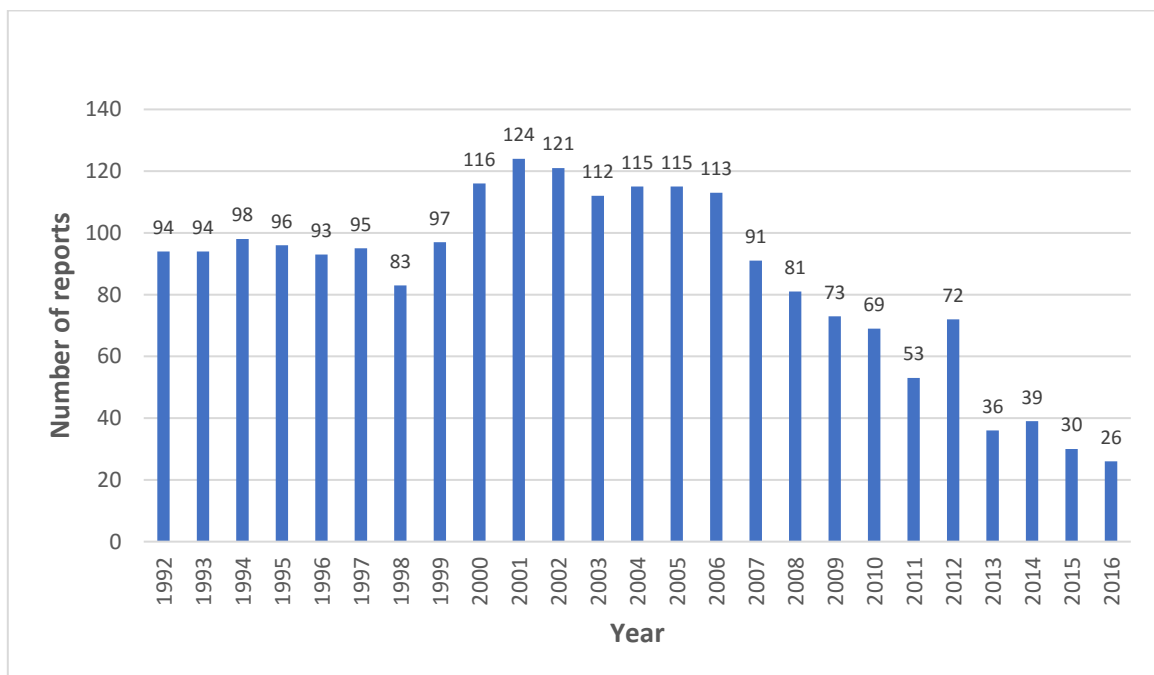
³ The number of national reports submitted by States in this period may be influenced by the shift from annual to biennial reporting following encouragement to this effect in the outcome document of the third and fourth Biennial Meeting of States (BMS3 and BMS4) under the PoA.

Figure 1. Number of reports submitted per State for the PoA between 2002 and 2012



Source: Data from S. Parker and K. Green, *A decade of implementing the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons*, UNIDIR, 2012, p. 5, see: <http://www.unidir.ch/files/publications/pdfs/a-decade-of-implementing-the-unpoa-analysis-of-national-reports-en-301.pdf>.

Figure 2. Number of UNROCA reports submitted between 1992 and 2016



Source: Data from UNROCA Website, *Participation Statistics*, see: <https://www.unroca.org/participation>.

These trends can in part be attributed to the challenges involved in reporting across various multilateral conventional arms treaties and instruments. These challenges are echoed in statements delivered by States in various forums. Some of the challenges most commonly identified by States include a lack of capacity and resources, a lack of information, and challenges related to multi-stakeholder coordination at the national level, all of which contribute to “reporting fatigue”.⁴ The ATT-Baseline Assessment Project’s report on ATT reporting experiences gives insights into the challenges experienced in different regions.⁵ The national capacity of States may also have implications for the completion of reports. While States with limited capacity might experience difficulties covering the breadth of topics covered in the reports, States with different points of contact for the various instruments might experience difficulties due to the complexity of information sharing and coordination processes when preparing reports. These challenges to reporting are compounded further by the reality that States do not have to report to one, but depending on membership, multiple conventional arms treaties and instruments with differing reporting obligations.

UNIDIR project on synergies in reporting under multilateral conventional arms treaties

In an effort to address some of the challenges associated with reporting, the UNIDIR project on synergies in reporting under multilateral conventional arms treaties and instruments seeks to identify options and approaches to facilitate and strengthen reporting by States. In particular, the project aims to provide guidance to States on converging sources of information, methods and approaches that can be used to facilitate reporting under various multilateral conventional arms instruments.

Objectives of the project

1. Identify and map reporting obligations and commitments for select multilateral treaties and instruments in the area of conventional arms.
2. Identify synergies in sources of information and record-keeping as well as methods to reporting and national coordination.
3. Explore possible options to facilitate and strengthen reporting by States, including identifying good practices, potential challenges and opportunities moving forward.

In undertaking this research, it is important to underline that reporting obligations and commitments vary from State to State, based on membership and/or participation in relevant multilateral conventional arms treaties and instruments. Variations in reporting obligations and participation may include, inter alia:

- Scope (type of information to be covered, including categories of conventional arms);
- Format (type of reporting template and fields);
- Legal nature of reporting (voluntary/mandatory);

⁴ See for example statements delivered by States at the Third Conference of State Parties to the ATT, 11-15 September 2017.

Available from: <http://www.thearmstradetreaty.org/index.php/en/sessions/3rd-conference-of-states-parties/csp3/statements>.

⁵ ATT-BAP, *Reporting in Review: Examining the ATT Reporting Experiences*, 2017. Available from: http://www.armstrade.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Reporting-in-Review_Examining-ATT-Reporting-Experiences_ATT-BAP.pdf.

- Confidentiality modalities (public/secured);
- Reporting timelines; and
- Record-keeping and information sharing requirements.

Though reporting obligations and participation vary based on these factors, there is value in identifying areas of convergence and complementarity as it can help make reporting exercises more meaningful and efficient for States, in particular at the national level.

Informal expert meeting on reporting synergies

An informal expert meeting was organized by UNIDIR in cooperation with the Stimson Center on 6 December 2017 in Geneva, Switzerland, to further explore the topic of reporting synergies and to identify options to facilitate States' reporting under select multilateral conventional arms treaties and instruments.

The meeting was attended by 33 representatives of Governments, expert organizations and custodian organizations, including the ATT Secretariat, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The meeting benefited from a wide geographic representation of States with participants from North America, Latin America, West Africa, Southern Africa, the Asia-Pacific region, the Caribbean and Europe. This allowed for a broad range of perspectives and experiences to be shared and for discussions to focus on concrete ways to assist States in their reporting obligations and participation.

This paper draws from the inputs provided during this informal expert meeting, maps synergies in reporting obligations among select multilateral conventional arms instruments and identifies synergies in sources of information and record-keeping as well as synergies in methods of reporting. It also explores opportunities to enhance reporting through the identification of good practices and challenges faced by States regarding reporting under multiple conventional arms treaties and instruments.

Synergies in reporting obligations and commitments among select multilateral conventional arms instruments and treaties

Facilitating reporting processes and making reporting benefits more tangible for States can help alleviate concerns about reporting fatigue and enhance the frequency and quality of reporting under select multilateral conventional arms treaties and instruments. In order to support States in strengthening their reporting exercises, lessen the reporting burden and promote a simplified, streamlined and more efficient reporting process that avoids duplication, UNIDIR, together with the Stimson Center, has developed a *Handbook on Synergies in Reporting among Select Multilateral Conventional Arms Instruments* (hereafter referred to as “the Handbook”).

Handbook on synergies in reporting

The Handbook provides a brief introduction to four conventional arms agreements and instruments examined by UNIDIR and the Stimson Center: the ATT, the Firearms Protocol (FP), the PoA and UNROCA. The Handbook includes an examination of the scope of these different instruments, cross-cutting reporting commitments, sources of information and national coordination mechanisms as they relate to reporting on international transfers. Lastly, the Handbook examines obstacles States face as well as opportunities to enhance their experience with reporting exercises.

The annexes to the Handbook provide a side-by-side visual comparison of analogous questions and content contained in various reporting templates. These “crosswalk” tables examine reporting templates applicable to national control systems (a comparison of the PoA reporting template and ATT initial report, organized by thematic areas) and reporting templates applicable to annual arms exports and imports (comparison of UNROCA and ATT annual reporting templates). Commentary, based on feedback provided by States, and additional information from research, is provided by UNIDIR and the Stimson Center.

Scope and audience of the Handbook

The experts present at the informal expert meeting (hereafter referred to as “the Group”) generally agreed that the proposed four conventional arms agreements and instruments are appropriate for exploring synergies in reporting applicable to international arms-related transfers. Some experts commented on the utility of considering relevant regional and subregional instruments in future research endeavours. The organizers noted that a comprehensive analysis including subregional instruments is beyond the scope of this iteration of the Handbook, but that references to good practices and lessons learned from regional and subregional experiences will be reflected, as appropriate.

The Group highlighted two main purposes for the Handbook:

- To support States that have not yet reported or are facing challenges to report; and
- To support States that are already reporting to continue to do so with greater ease, higher frequency and quality.

Lastly, regarding the scope of the Handbook, some experts noted that in addition to international transfers and diversion, post-delivery measures should be considered, time and capacity permitted. Examples included marking, stockpile management, disposal, collection and seizures, as for instance comprised in the PoA and FP. The organizers noted that post-delivery measures as they relate to international transfers would be considered, as appropriate.

Synergies in types and sources of information and record-keeping

Sources of information

On the topic of sources of information, the Group discussed the utility of and challenges to centralization of the sources of data (“one-stop shop”) while comparing practices to a de-centralized approach at the national level. Experts from States with a de-centralized approach reported that numerous agencies (for example the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defence, customs agency and national police) were involved in the collection of data and the preparation of the relevant reports. In such de-centralized national systems, several experts noted that strong coordination and information exchange among several different ministries and/or agencies (e.g. armed forces for information on military expenditure, national police for imports of civilian firearms, industry) were necessary in the process of preparing national reports for multilateral conventional arms agreements and instruments. Experts agreed that this coordination effort (see also next section) required significant time and preparation, particularly for those States that participated in a large number of reporting exercises. It was considered essential to establish a list of relevant stakeholders (such as points of contact) and a timeline for when to contact them, in order to receive relevant data on international transfers in time for the submission of the different reports.

Several experts mentioned challenges regarding the process of collecting data relevant for reporting obligations. The Group discussed the issue of ownership of data, noting that often the entities/contacts responsible for preparing reports are not the owners of the data on transfers, and that their roles and responsibilities are limited to working with submitted information from respective departments/agencies. The collection of relevant data thus requires buy-in and ownership from the different stakeholders that need to be contacted in the data collection process. Several experts pointed out that domestic agencies that own data may not see the direct relevance of a data collection process strictly for the purpose of reporting under multilateral conventional arms instruments, and therefore, do not view requests for inter-agency cooperation for reporting as a high priority. In such cases, several experts reflected that it is crucial to demonstrate the benefits of reporting to the relevant stakeholders so they do not view it as a redundant administrative exercise but understand the purpose and benefits of submitting information. In this context, it was noted that it might be helpful to highlight the synergies between the different instruments to the concerned stakeholder to help raise awareness on how data submitted for reporting under multiple instruments can be used and analysed for various operational purposes at the national level. In general, the Group discussed the importance of awareness-raising and regular exchange among relevant national stakeholders, including industry and economic actors, in order to make them cognizant of changing reporting obligations and to facilitate access to data.

Another challenge raised by the Group was the issue of data confidentiality. Many of the experts noted that information exchange even at the national level poses difficulties due to access restrictions. The Group also reflected on the time pressure related to data de-sensitization prior to use for reporting purposes. Generally, experts underlined the importance of collating, monitoring and verifying data from the various relevant actors, including from industry and economic actors. Various experts explained that it is common practice to ask industry actors to submit their information to the relevant national authority. Several experts mentioned that in some States such information is already centralized in a database system and managed by a competent national authority.

One expert noted that there might be caveats to the general transferability and usability of data if information was collected by a particular agency for a specific purpose. For example, data that might

be collected by law enforcement (for instance on specific diversion cases) would need to be scrutinized for their applicability for reporting purposes across instruments.

Experts also discussed definitions of weapons used under the different treaties and instruments, with some instruments covering the scope of conventional weapons and others covering, specifically, small arms and light weapons (SALW) or firearms. In addition, several experts expressed concerns regarding data collection with respect to the sub-categories of SALW as well as parts and components of conventional arms categories given the varying definitions nationally as well as among select conventional arms agreements and instruments. Consequently, it was noted that subject-matter expertise was required to assess the transferability and usability of data in these cases.

Types of data

In terms of the types of data that is needed and used for reporting under multilateral conventional arms instruments, the Group discussed in detail issues related to export and import data.

With regard to export data, the Group extensively debated the technical aspects of managing information related to actual versus authorized transfers. Often, data on authorized exports is easier to access, while data on actual exports needs to be obtained from other domestic stakeholders, such as customs and economic actors. Several experts referenced their national systems in this regard, noting that automatic electronic licensing systems had been established which in some cases were linked to customs authorities, in order to receive numbers on actual exports. In this context, some experts raised concerns with respect to technological as well as technical challenges regarding the system of information exchange with relevant national stakeholders, in particular customs. Further, some experts noted that a comprehensive automated system of data collection and exchange on exports at the national level was the exception rather than the norm globally, in particular for developing States as well as those States that mainly undertake arms imports.

One topic highlighted by the Group was the nature of discrepancies in reported data between actual and authorized exports due to the time gap between the data collection and the reporting exercise. Several experts noted that this could contribute to misinformation and discrepancies in data over the years or when comparing transfer data between importing and exporting parties. Consequently, several experts expressed that diligent follow-ups are necessary in order to obtain valid numbers and to address gaps and/or discrepancies related to authorized transfer and actual transfers.

In this context, the challenge of common economic zones such as the European Union was mentioned. Several experts elaborated on this point, explaining that customs code changes are approved at the regional level and that there was a persistent lack of clarity on data collection related to open and/or general licences, as well as transfers conducted under simplified procedures.

Regarding import data, most experts noted that such information remained de-centralized and difficult to monitor. Some importing States showed interest in automated electronic licensing systems linked to customs to collect data. Most experts shared the view that record-keeping on imported conventional arms were not as comprehensive or closely monitored as exports, with one expert noting that there often was lack of clarity on actual imports.

Lastly, the Group discussed the need to include data on all sub-categories of SALW, as well as parts and components of conventional arms categories due to differing interpretations of the definitions of the sub-categories of weapons. It was suggested that record-keeping of parts and components might pose challenges for reporting officers since such information may not be accurately recorded by relevant national stakeholders, such as customs officials.

Record-keeping database systems

In terms of record-keeping database systems, the Group exchanged views on how databases at the national level related to arms transfers were often not built for reporting to multilateral conventional arms instruments. Some experts explained that dedicated databases were developed in their States, but others noted that such undertakings were an exception to the norm. Most experts agreed that such databases should be centralized and enable easy access to relevant data.

Furthermore, several participants expressed interest in enhancing data sharing between existing databases, for example with customs databases through the use of custom codes and information exchange networks. Several experts commented on the need for States that have developed sophisticated databases to share good practices and lessons learned with States wishing to establish comprehensive record-keeping systems. The Group generally agreed that before commencing the process of developing a database, it was essential to understand the information flows at the domestic level and to develop an appropriate roadmap for the establishment of a database system. It was underlined that developing a comprehensive, electronic database required time, resources and political will, but most participants agreed that while such a process is cumbersome in the beginning, it would facilitate better and more efficient reporting in the long run.

Synergies in methods and approaches to reporting

National coordination

Several experts at the informal expert meeting shared information on their national coordination mechanisms as they related to reporting exercises. Contrasting approaches were shared in this regard, in particular on the use of points of contact. A few experts noted that their States had one point of contact for several conventional arms instruments, while a majority of the experts reflected that their States maintained multiple points of contact for the various instruments, which posed a challenge for inter-agency coordination in preparing national reports. A number of experts explained that points of contact from other States were contacted on an “as-needed” basis, although such practices were more regularly observed for States, which participated in common economic regions or those regions with regional organizations that frequently supported information exchange among their member States.

Participants from States with well-developed national coordination systems shared that it is useful to have a national document that details all relevant points of contact and procedures for reporting. Such a paper needs to be kept up-to-date and should serve as a reference for all reporting obligations. Experts also noted that it was helpful to have an internal “dashboard” with a timeline for the national coordination process. Such a timeline should ideally include dedicated time periods for:

- Data collection from the relevant stakeholders, follow-up reminders, electronic aggregation of data;
- National “data workshops” on data collection, verification and selection (depending on the definitions used);
- Inter-agency coordination meetings with all relevant ministries and agencies; and
- Finalization of the reports, to be shared with appropriate contacts for submission.

Several experts highlighted the value of having one agency or ministry, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as the focal point for the coordination process to enhance a sense of ownership and accountability.

The Group discussed challenges related to internal versus external reporting deadlines, noting that internal preparations for reporting cannot always be aligned to multilateral reporting timelines. The Group expressed interest in exploring how the different multilateral instruments can better align reporting deadlines, as appropriate. Several experts referenced the example of alignment between the ATT annual report and the UNROCA reporting deadline and how this had facilitated internal planning at the domestic level for preparing national reports. Other experts reflected that timely submission of national reports alone did not serve as a useful indicator to determine States’ preparedness to report, as national timelines often did not align to the deadlines set by select multilateral conventional arms agreements and instruments.

The Group also discussed the challenges related to staff turnover and the retention of expertise as it related to reporting. Possible solutions discussed during the expert meeting included the establishment of a “national body” dedicated to overseeing and monitoring reporting exercise and developing written procedures that might help in the case of staff turnover. One expert suggested the institutionalization of the contact details of the reporting point of contact so that handover of tasks is facilitated in the case of a change of personnel.

Information sharing

The topic of information sharing was discussed both with regard to information exchange between States and between different instruments. With regard to information sharing among States at the multilateral level, experts noted that States should continue, as appropriate, to share information based on relevant and applicable global and subregional commitments. Most of the experts noted that voluntarily submitted public reports, such as the PoA and UNROCA, served as a good basis for information exchange on international transfers and their control systems.

With regard to the benefits of information sharing, it was noted that participation in information exchange exercises helped enhance analysis of transfer trends, evaluation of implementation progress in comparison to their neighbouring States and States in their region, as well as identification of international assistance and cooperation needs.

With regard to the promotion of information exchange among States at the international level, several experts noted that concerns related to sensitivity of information remained a key obstacle to improving participation. Some experts noted that such concerns might be minimized by explaining the purpose of reporting and highlighting options to make sections of reports not public. Other experts shared the view that information sharing was more appropriate at bilateral and subregional levels, where a degree of confidence and trust may already exist to facilitate information exchange. Further, the same experts noted that information exchange commitments and mechanisms were often more stringent in subregional instruments than multilateral conventional arms instruments and that there was a need to enhance the capacity of regional organizations to enhance information exchange frameworks.

Use of templates, tools and guidance documents for reporting

The Group examined methods and approaches to enhance reporting to select multilateral conventional arms instruments, with specific focus on the use of existing reporting templates, tools and guidance documents. The custodian organizations participating in this informal expert meeting provided the Group with various ongoing and proposed initiatives to strengthen reporting. This subsection presents several such initiatives.

With regard to coordination among custodian organizations to facilitate reporting by States, UNODA and OSCE highlighted their recent efforts to harmonize global and regional reporting templates related to SALW. UNODA demonstrated an online reporting tool that links the PoA and OSCE reporting template data fields, where appropriate, thereby enabling OSCE participating States to submit reports on both the PoA and the OSCE document on small arms and light weapons. Upon submission of an OSCE report, participating States are provided with an option to submit the report to UNODA by using a password for authentication purposes. Participants welcomed such efforts by the custodian organizations to simplify reporting exercises and avoid duplication of efforts. Other subregional and custodian organizations were encouraged to consider similar processes.

In terms of capacity-building support to States in strengthening reporting, the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC) shared a project focused on enhancing cooperation among license officers in its region to support them in the preparation of national reports on arms exports. The software solution that was developed under this initiative not only helped collect data systematically, but also offered the option for States to organize relevant data for UNROCA and OSCE reporting purposes. Experts acknowledged the benefits of such assistance for regional confidence-building and transparency.

With regard to simplifying reporting processes, several experts welcomed the efforts of UNODA to combine reporting templates for the PoA and the International Tracing Instrument into a single template, thereby reducing the burden of preparing two national reports. Revision on the PoA online reporting template, such as enabling submission of a national report that builds on previously submitted information, was also well received by the Group. Further, some experts also welcomed the decision by States under the PoA review cycles to change national reporting from an annual to a biennial exercise, reducing the frequency of reports to be submitted. Lastly, most experts welcomed the reporting approach established under the ATT framework for two primary reasons. First, State Parties only need to submit an initial report on national controls systems once (and to submit, as needed, when control systems are updated). Second, State Parties can use the ATT annual reporting template to submit their national reports for the UNROCA.

Regarding the use of submitted reports, several custodian organizations noted the need for capacity and a clear mandate to undertake tasks related to the use of reported data. Several experts pointed out that, if such tasks were not to be undertaken by custodian organizations, other entities such as specialized NGOs or working groups that exist within a multilateral instrument might be best positioned to undertake this role. In this regard, several experts referenced the opportunities within the Working Group on Transparency and Reporting under the ATT. This Working Group could further explore how to better utilize voluntary information, submitted by States as part of the ATT initial and annual reports that is not sensitive in nature.

Several experts mentioned that submitted reports could serve as a useful tool in identifying international cooperation and assistance needs. Some experts, however, were sceptical of the accuracy and validity of the international cooperation and assistance requests made in such reports, as they were often not detailed enough for donors to consider for financing, while others felt that the “wish list” may not actually reflect the needs of the requesting State.

In an effort to enhance the use of data voluntarily provided by States to United Nations instruments, UNODA presented its PoA-related web-platform to the Group. This platform is currently in development. The platform, once launched, aims to present aggregate data on reported measures under the PoA and to pull data from related existing databases, such as the United Nations Comtrade, to form a country profile on SALW control. The proposed platform would also enable States to undertake interactive comparison by regions/subregions and/or by themes. This was generally well received by the Group.

With regard to the use of analytical tools, some experts noted the need to better utilize “big-data platforms” to support analysis of reported measures by the custodian organizations. A few experts raised questions regarding the purpose of such big-data platforms, voicing the need to clarify the end goal of such analysis. Other experts noted that such an undertaking should not be challenging to initiate, given that the majority of reports submitted by States, under the PoA for instance, were publically available and submitted voluntarily. Several experts noted that big-data platforms would better support Member States in gaining an enhanced understanding of trends, challenges and opportunities on small arms control, in particular in the area for international cooperation and assistance.

Another expert emphasized the utility of an automated analytical tool that highlights potential discrepancies in the data reported by different States, i.e. if the data submitted by two different States on one transfer do not match. Such a system could help prevent oversights and enhance the quality of reporting. Several participants saw utility in the development of such automated analytical tools.

The Group also discussed the value of guidance documents, especially for States that were new to the reporting process. Guidance documents, such as the Swedish Working Paper on National-level

Measures to Facilitate Compliance with International Reporting Obligations and Commitments (ATT/CSP2/2016/WP.5), were mentioned in this context.⁶ With regard to the types of guidance documents that would be of value, it was noted that both technical guidance (i.e. definitions, ways to fill out templates) as well as substantive documents on the reporting process (i.e. how to report and how to obtain data from varying sources) would be useful. One expert stated that mistakes that are made while utilizing templates reflect possible misunderstandings about the requested information and that specific guidance might help States to provide accurate responses.

Finally, the Group considered specific challenges to reporting templates and tools. While recognizing that the reporting templates themselves can create synergies between different reporting instruments, some experts voiced concern about the rigidity of existing reporting templates. For example, certain reporting templates only provide yes/no answers. These experts expressed that simply making answers quantitative would not in itself ensure that the information was useful in terms of supporting the various objectives of the reporting obligations.

⁶ Arms Trade Treaty, “ATT Working Group on Transparency and Reporting Co-chairs’ Draft Report to CSP3”, Annex B. Available from: http://thearmstradetreaty.org/images/CSP3_Documents/WG_documents/WGTR_-_Draft_Report_to_CSP3_-_Rev1_-_EN.pdf.

Opportunities to enhance reporting in the area of conventional arms

The last session of the informal expert meeting discussed and identified opportunities to enhance reporting in select multilateral conventional arms agreements and instruments. The Group examined various options to strengthen reporting, covering the following issues during the session: use of reported data; incentives to encourage participation in reporting; measures to address diversion; good reporting practices; and feedback mechanisms on submitted reports.

Use and analysis of submitted reports

With regard to the frequency of using submitted reports and their related data (of own or of other States), most experts noted that submitted reports were not often directly used in their entirety. However, data collected for preparing reports was frequently used, *inter alia* for national policy debates, for parliamentary or civil society inquiries, or to report to other related multilateral and regional conventional arms instruments or treaties. Several experts noted that in their States, reports prepared at the domestic level on arms transfers served as a blueprint for preparing reports to multilateral conventional arms agreements and instruments. Several experts also noted that the data collected for certain multilateral instruments, notably the PoA and the FP, were applicable for reporting under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (in particular for SDG 16.4, which aims to significantly reduce illicit arms flows).

The Group also discussed analytical purposes for which the submitted reports and their related data have been used. Several experts explained that submitted data is often used for comparative analyses, in particular among neighbouring States. These experts noted that it was a common practice to look at reports submitted by neighbouring States and trade partners. It was noted that the data used for reporting was useful in bilateral consultations on reported transfers, to respond to parliamentary or civil society inquiries and to review national policies related to arms trade. It was also underlined that the data submitted was frequently used for the review and analysis of licence authorizations and requests. In addition, some experts noted that reported data, in particular on end users, items and/or routes, were used to inform the development and/or revision of national assessments on risks of diversion. Select experts mentioned that they use the information provided in other States' reports to check and verify their own data submitted on transfers. A few experts referenced analysis of submitted reports for monitoring compliance, as well as for ensuring quality control purposes. Participants also noted that analysis of reported data was used at the national level to identify strategic focus areas as well as international cooperation and assistance needs. Yet, some experts noted that this was not always useful, as assistance needs identified in national reports alone were often not detailed enough and required further dialogue between the assistance providing States and the potential recipient States. In this regard, experts noted that a dedicated forum to discuss assistance needs based on national reports could be established, as appropriate. Reported measures could also be used as a means of establishing priority areas to be examined in existing working groups (e.g. ATT) and/or in preparing for review cycles (e.g. PoA). Further, several experts noted that reported data could form the basis of information exchange on good practice identification and the sharing of experiences to strengthen national controls.

In response to the question on what information could be more specifically analysed from submitted reports, several experts noted the need to explore discrepancies in the reported data and to conduct "technical follow ups"—e.g. on whether and how granted licenses have been used. Finally, it was noted that further analysis of the submitted reports to develop awareness-raising and outreach strategies to promote the select multilateral conventional arms instruments would be useful.

Incentives to motivate participation in reporting

In terms of positive and negative incentives to motivate participation in reporting, the Group raised ideas for further consideration. In terms of negative incentives, the role of civil society in “naming and shaming” based on compliance was discussed. Several experts also mentioned that assistance eligibility and/or prioritization could be based on positive compliance with reporting obligations, including for sponsorship requests and project selection.

In terms of positive incentives, experts discussed the utility of the compilation of assistance needs and the organization of dedicated forums to hold consultations on those issues that most require assistance. Moreover, experts noted that positive compliance with reporting obligations could be factored into the selection of office holders in multilateral conventional arms agreements and instruments. In addition, the simplification of reporting templates and approaches, such as the above-mentioned case presented by UNODA and OSCE, was debated. Experts also discussed the need to make the benefits of reporting more tangible for States, e.g. by highlighting the usability of the reported data for other reporting exercises, international assistance requests and/or the evaluation of national policy on arms transfers. Lastly, one expert suggested that positive compliance with transit and transshipment measures and reporting on them could be used to promote and attract foreign direct investment.

Diversion and reporting

Reporting on diversion measures remains under-utilized at this time and was identified by the Group as an area with considerable potential for enhancement. One of the challenges experts noted with regard to reporting on diversion was the sensitivity related to measures taken against or data related to diverted materiel and that such constraints needed to be overcome to better utilize the reporting frameworks on diversion. The Group also discussed opportunities associated with reporting on diversion, which was recognized by participants as a critical topic in terms of creating synergies across instruments and reporting. This included a potential reporting template for measures taken to address diversion, for example within the ATT Working Group on Transparency and Reporting. Another opportunity mentioned was a paper on how to report on measures taken to prevent diversion (similar to the idea of frequently asked questions on reporting in the ATT, a paper drafted by Belgium). Lastly, several experts noted that synergies in reported data—in particular from PoA national reports, initial reports of the ATT and questionnaires provided to UNODC related to FP—could be identified to support the compilation of measures taken to address diversion at the national level. In this regard, a few experts welcomed input on ideas to make progress on the reporting and diversion issue. Lastly, one expert raised the importance of considering ammunition in the reporting exercises on preventing diversion. While reporting on ammunition was not discussed in detail during the informal expert meeting, many of the experts recognized opportunities to further elaborate on this matter.

Good practices at the national, regional and multilateral levels

With regard to good practices to enhance reporting, the Group identified the following:

- National legislation requiring the State to prepare and submit reports related to arms transfers at the national level (e.g. for use by Parliament/Congress). Such a legal provision helps create a practice of reporting at the national level, data from which could be used for relevant multilateral instruments.

- Linking reporting obligations to a national arms control strategy (such as counter-proliferation) in order to promote the utility of reports produced at the national and regional levels.
- Standardization of reporting processes and procedures of different relevant actors at the national level. In this regard, the development of a reporting matrix at the national level that contains reporting obligations, procedures and deadlines may be a useful tool to enhance national coordination.
- A follow-up mechanism from the custodian organization on received reports, including technical follow-ups on the reports submitted.
- Institutionalization of points of contact with common email addresses and phone numbers to mitigate the effects of staff turnover.
- Adoption of a national “countering proliferation lens” to track imports, proliferation risks and end use/users of weapons.
- Convening of dedicated regional or multilateral forums specifically on the topic of reporting to facilitate cross-fertilization and information exchange among Member States and to provide additional guidance, as requested.

With regard to contributions of reporting exercises at the regional and subregional level that could support reporting for multilateral conventional arms agreements and instruments, some experts described that several Governments had developed a matrix or database on areas of convergence between the aforementioned instruments and relevant regional instruments. These experts noted that many regional and subregional instruments, such as OSCE and the Kinshasa Convention, have more stringent reporting obligations and that information prepared and shared at the regional level should be better utilized for reporting to multilateral instruments. The UNODA-OSCE project was highlighted as a good example of a harmonization of reporting commitments and templates. Moreover, SEESAC was cited as an example of good practice regarding the use of local languages to facilitate reporting. It was also mentioned that using local languages for technical support on reporting could help overcome challenges related to capturing the nuances or potential ambiguities.

Feedback mechanisms for reporting

The Group discussed opportunities related to feedback mechanisms for reporting, which fostered an active discussion during the informal expert meeting. First, it was noted that technical feedback and/or follow up to submitted reports would be useful. This could include an acknowledgement of receipt of the report, addressing any discrepancies or omissions of information and the confidentiality of any particular information that has been reported. It was noted that feedback mechanisms should not be referred to as “review processes” as this terminology could be misunderstood to include verification measures.

The Group also explored the topic of bilateral feedback mechanisms, i.e. dialogue between partners on the submitted report, thus increasing transparency and confidence. It was explained that such feedback mechanism could be focused on improving the quality of the reports submitted. However, the issue of how to conduct quality assurance for submitted reports was not discussed in detail. Some experts noted that feedback mechanisms could also form a basis for verification efforts by civil society, as appropriate, on the information submitted in national reports. Finally, participants also highlighted the utility of a dedicated feedback mechanism focused on international cooperation and assistance from submitted reports.

Conclusion

The informal expert meeting touched on a wide range of issues pertaining to synergies in reporting under select multilateral conventional arms agreements and instruments. The discussions were not limited to reflections on the status quo and current challenges, but the Group also explored good practices at the national, regional and multilateral level as well as opportunities to enhance synergies in reporting under select instruments. This section presents the key points raised in this meeting and offers concluding remarks.

It was recognized that the issue of reporting is often seen in fragmentation, with each agreement and instrument operating independently from one another. While it was acknowledged that reporting under select multilateral conventional arms agreements and instruments served various objectives, and that each merited specific attention, it was also recognized that a cross-cutting examination—without prejudice to the nature of reporting requirements and membership of the instrument considered—could be useful in promoting a more integrated approach to reporting. Such a cross-cutting examination would help identify the areas of complementarities and avoid duplication of efforts.

It was noted that such an examination was particularly important and timely given the wide range of challenges that practitioners faced in reporting to multilateral agreements and instruments. The key challenges identified by the Group included:

- Lack of resources and capacity at the national level;
- Lack of relevant information maintained at the national level;
- Inadequate record-keeping systems and modalities among stakeholders;
- Lack of data validation and verification mechanisms and capacity at the national level;
- Inadequate inter-agency coordination mechanism related to reporting; and
- Varying reporting obligations/commitments, templates and information format, depending on the membership.

These challenges, in addition to others noted by the Group, all contributed to the sense of reporting fatigue among States.

In exploring options and approaches to enhance reporting, the Group focused on three main areas: 1) sources of information; 2) methods and approaches to reporting; and 3) ideas for strengthening engagement in reporting exercises. The key issues raised by the Group are presented below.

With regard to sources of information and record-keeping, experts highlighted the importance of closely scrutinizing the underlying definitions of weaponry and components and to distinguish between authorized and actual transfers. Some experts underlined the value of linking relevant database systems and thus connecting relevant stakeholders in de-centralized, multi-stakeholder processes. It was also noted that data selection and verification required subject-matter expertise and that data collection from multiple stakeholders requires buy-in, especially if those stakeholders do not see the direct value of reporting to their work.

In terms of methods and approaches to reporting, the Group shared options to enhance national coordination mechanisms, such as internal and external timelines, dedicated institutionalized points of contact and national documents and dashboards that comprise relevant stakeholders and deadlines. Experts also highlighted the utility of tools, templates and guidance documents in facilitating the reporting process.

Regarding opportunities and ideas to strengthen reporting in the area of conventional arms, the Group reflected on ways to better use submitted reports to conduct analysis on arms exports, to

assist in completing related national reports and to conduct relevant national assessments. Experts also discussed potential positive and negative incentives to motivate participation in reporting, such as assistance eligibility and/or prioritization or the selection of office holders in multilateral conventional arms forums. Reporting on diversion measures was identified by the Group as one with key areas for focus at the multilateral level and several examples were shared (e.g. reporting templates or a national paper for measures taken to address diversion).

In terms of consolidating good practices, the Group identified a range of possible options, including:

- National legislation requiring the State to prepare and submit reports at domestic levels;
- Linking reporting obligations to national strategies related to arms control;
- Institutionalizing points of contact on reporting;
- Development and use of a national paper that details the structure and procedures for reporting;
- A dedicated national body designed to internally monitor reporting obligations and deadlines for report submission;
- Development of a reporting matrix at the national level;
- A data-related conference and national consultative workshops on information pertinent to reporting;
- Linking reporting interfaces and tools between custodian organizations;
- Development of centralized reporting tools across instruments at the regional and subregional levels;
- Enhanced reporting analysis platforms for public or limited access use;
- Aligning reporting deadlines and frequency of submission;
- Enabling technical follow-up mechanisms to consult on discrepancies or omissions at the request of States; and
- Systematic process to enable the use of information prepared for reporting at the regional level for reporting to multilateral agreements and instruments.

Many experts expressed that in order to address the pertinent issue of reporting fatigue, the good practices shared at the informal expert meeting represent concrete opportunities to enhance States' reporting experience. UNIDIR was also encouraged to share these findings at relevant multilateral conventional arms forums, as appropriate.

Meeting Summary

Synergies in Reporting Under Multilateral Conventional Arms Treaties and Instruments

**Geneva, Switzerland
6 December 2017**

In 2017, UNIDIR, in partnership with the Stimson Center, undertook a project entitled “Exploring Synergies in Reporting under Multilateral Conventional Arms Treaties and Instruments”. This project sought to provide practical guidance to States on converging sources of information, methods and approaches that can be used to facilitate reporting under select multilateral conventional treaties and instruments. On 6 December 2017, UNIDIR convened a small, closed-door meeting with representatives of States, custodian organizations and expert NGOs on this issue. This paper presents a summary of this meeting’s discussions and findings.