

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA
State Secretariat STS-FDFA
Peace and Human Rights

SUMMARY REPORT

Regional seminar on the prevention of violent extremism and the management of conventional weapons in West Africa

LOMÉ, TOGO, 5-7 DECEMBER 2023



Acknowledgements

The Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) and the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC) would like to extend their warmest thanks to all participants in the regional seminar: local, national, regional and international officials responsible for conventional weapons management and the prevention of violent extremism, national and local members of parliament, representatives of national human rights commissions, representatives of civil society and research institutes, and individual experts. The co-organizers would like to express their sincere appreciation to the Togolese authorities for hosting the event and for their active participation in it. They would also like to thank senior consultant Mr Nakmak Douiti, who supported the three co-organizers' teams. Finally, UNIDIR and UNREC would like to thank the Swiss government for providing the main funding for this activity, as well as their other donors whose funding enables their day-to-day operations.

This summary report was prepared by Nakmak Douiti, Mohamed Coulibaly, Ursign Hofmann, Carol Mottet, Matilde Vecchioni and Anselme Yabouri.

Note

The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Swiss FDFA nor the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. This publication presents the content of the seminar and does not necessarily express the views or opinions of the Swiss FDFA, nor those of the United Nations, UNIDIR, UNREC, their staff members or sponsors.

Cover photo credit: UN Photo / Albert Gonzalez Ferran.

About the partners

UNIDIR

UNIDIR is a voluntarily funded, autonomous institute within the United Nations. One of the few policy institutes worldwide focusing on disarmament, UNIDIR generates knowledge and promotes dialogue and action on disarmament and security. Based in Geneva, UNIDIR assists the international community to develop the practical, innovative ideas needed to find solutions to critical security problems. UNIDIR's priorities include conducting research, developing tools and providing guidance to its partners, both to strengthen the management of conventional weapons and ammunition and to support the integration of conventional weapons control into United Nations conflict analysis, prevention and management activities.

Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

Since 2016, Switzerland has been active in the prevention of violent extremism. It is implementing a programme of advocacy, dialogue and training activities to promote an approach to prevention focused on the causes of violence and providing alternatives to violence, primarily in West and Central Africa. Switzerland has also been involved for many years in the safe and secure management of weapons and ammunition at the political, normative and operational levels. In line with its 2022–2025 Arms Control and Disarmament Strategy, it is working in particular to integrate the management of weapons and ammunition into peacebuilding efforts. Two of Switzerland's four thematic priorities as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for 2023–2024 are building sustainable peace and protecting civilians.

UNREC

Created in 1986, UNREC supports African regional and sub-regional organizations, including ECOWAS, and States, technical and financial partners, and civil society organizations in the fields of disarmament, peace and preventing violent extremism. UNREC is the only United Nations regional entity specialized in disarmament and non-proliferation on the African continent. Its main function is to support Member States to translate decisions, instruments and commitments in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation into action, at the national, sub-regional and regional levels. Given its location in Africa, UNREC pays close attention to the links between security, disarmament and development. UNREC supports African Member States and intergovernmental organizations by strengthening their capacity and providing the technical, legal and substantive assistance they need to achieve lasting peace and security.

Table of Contents

Acronyms and Abbreviations	5
Executive Summary	6
1. Introduction	12
1.1 Context	12
1.2 About the seminar	12
2. Opening Statements	14
3. Summary of discussions	16
3.1 Context and challenges relating to the proliferation of conventional weapons and armed violence in West Africa	16
3.2 Holistic approaches to the prevention of violent extremism, considering the supply of and demand for conventional weapons	19
3.3 Reflection on prevention-focused solutions and measures at the national level, based on conventional weapons management	22
3.4 Reflection on prevention-focused solutions and measures at the regional, continental and international levels, based on conventional weapons management	25
4. Conclusion	29
Annex - Selection of useful resources	30

Boxes

Box 1: Summary of conclusions and recommendations by seminar participants	8
Box 2: Individual human capital and development as key prevention measures	21
Box 3: WAM and PVE in local realities and communities	24
Box 4: Non-exhaustive overview of relevant regional, continental and international frameworks on WAM and PVE	26

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AU	African Union
CIPLEV	Interministerial Committee for Preventing and Combating Violent Extremism
CMA	Joint civilian and military activities
DSF	Defence and security forces
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FDFA	Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
IED	Improvised explosive device
MANPADS	Man-portable air defence system
NATCOM	National Commission to Combat the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons
PVE	Preventing violent extremism
SALIENT	Saving Lives Entity
SALW	Small arms and light weapons
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNIDIR	United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research
UNREC	United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa
UNSCAR	United Nations Trust Facility Supporting Cooperation on Arms Regulation
WAM	Weapons and ammunition management

Executive Summary

Armed violence is a complex phenomenon. While its drivers depend on the context, the use of weapons is a constant. In recent years, West Africa has witnessed the evolution and proliferation of local and cross-border conflicts due to the emergence of armed groups, including violent extremist groups. This trend is driven by the presence and proliferation of conventional weapons and ammunition.

Responses to this rise in armed violence and violent extremism in West Africa have above all centred on military and security measures. Such measures have become the primary accepted method of (non-peaceful) conflict management, while other approaches have been sidelined. In this context, it seems that the role of conventional weapons and ammunition has not, until now, been sufficiently considered. The link between the availability and proliferation of weapons and ammunition on the one hand and the violence of violent extremist groups on the other can be easily shown. The question remains whether stakeholders actually address this link in their efforts to sustainably prevent the proliferation of conventional weapons and violent extremism.

The Peace and Human Rights Division of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) and the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC) organized the “Regional seminar on the prevention of violent extremism and the management of conventional weapons in West Africa”, which took place from 5 to 7 December 2023 in Lomé, Togo.¹ Its main aim was to strengthen the contribution of conventional weapons and ammunition management (WAM) to efforts to prevent violent extremism (PVE) – and vice versa – in West Africa. In so doing, it sought to mobilize a sustainable and joint approach across these areas.

The seminar brought together around sixty participants from approximately fifteen West African countries, including senior local and national officials responsible for WAM and PVE. They were accompanied by national and local members of parliament, representatives of national human rights commissions, the United Nations (UN) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), members of civil society, research institutes and think tanks, and individual experts. This meeting addressed a clear gap by bringing together experts in and officials responsible for both WAM and PVE respectively. The diversity, quality and expertise of participants enabled open discussion and in-depth understanding of the subjects covered. The seminar was therefore able to identify key approaches to better address the interconnection between WAM and PVE.

The seminar highlighted the intrinsic links between the proliferation of conventional weapons, particularly small arms and light weapons, and violent extremism. The overall observation is that violent extremism and the proliferation of weapons are on the rise and continue to have a negative impact on West African

1 The regional seminar and the summary of conclusions and recommendations by participants used the terms “conventional weapons” and “conventional weapons management” in a broad sense to include ammunition.

States. These two phenomena contribute to the deterioration of the security situation in the region, which in turn aggravates these phenomena, generating a vicious cycle. This situation is exacerbated by new weapons-related threats – such as improvised explosive devices and drones – and the spread of violent extremist groups from the central Sahel to coastal States. The seminar also confirmed that those working to build peace and prevent violence have not, until now, sufficiently considered the links between WAM and PVE, through public policy, institutions, normative, strategic and policy frameworks, and in practice.

To strengthen these links, the regional seminar notably:

- ▶ Identified pathways to understand the origin and availability of conventional weapons (supply) and the motivations underlying the acquisition and use of weapons (demand). It recommended more empirical research in this area, recognizing in particular that there is currently insufficient understanding of the demand for weapons.
- ▶ Recognized that a holistic, prevention-focused approach to WAM, centred on people and human security, is needed to sustainably and effectively prevent armed violence. Such an approach requires concerted action at all levels to address the root causes of this violence, as well as the origin and availability of weapons.
- ▶ Suggested that fora dedicated to multi-stakeholder dialogue and the exchange of good practice be organized regularly, at the local, national, regional, continental and international levels, to foster a common understanding of a holistic approach to WAM and PVE.
- ▶ Encouraged the national institutions responsible for WAM and PVE to:
 - ▶ Strengthen dialogue between them and meet regularly to facilitate the coordination of their interconnected efforts to prevent violence, through public policy, institutions, normative, strategic and policy frameworks, and in practice.
 - ▶ Involve other relevant stakeholders, such as national human rights institutions, parliamentarians, political parties, civil society, local communities – in particular traditional and religious leaders –, women and young people, research and training centres and the media, in recognition of the fact that preventing armed violence requires an inclusive approach.
 - ▶ Work together and harness the opportunities of being present in decentralized locations to engage jointly with local populations.
- ▶ Emphasized that local and national action should be at the heart of WAM and PVE, while recalling that regional action is also essential in view of the cross-border nature of the threat.
- ▶ Recommended that a study be launched to systematically assess the existing national and regional frameworks for WAM and PVE and the links between them, focusing on West Africa.
- ▶ Suggested launching a regional process to integrate WAM and PVE, by inviting ECOWAS in particular to explore the possibility of drawing up regional guidelines for Member States on the mutual integration of these two areas.
- ▶ Noted the link established between WAM and the prevention of conflict and armed violence in the UN Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace, and stressed the importance of capitalizing on this new framework.

The seminar resulted in a summary of conclusions and recommendations approved by participants at the final plenary session, set out in the box below. These conclusions and recommendations bear

witness to the broad spectrum of issues addressed. Above all, they identify concrete measures to prevent armed violence through a holistic approach to WAM, by tackling the root causes of the demand for weapons, as well as tackling the supply of weapons.

Box 1: Summary of conclusions and recommendations by seminar participants

More than 60 participants took part in the “Regional seminar on the prevention of violent extremism and the management of conventional weapons in West Africa” in Lomé from 5 to 7 December 2023. This seminar was organized by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC) and the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR). It gathered participants from some fifteen countries: senior officials in public administrations responsible for the management of conventional weapons or the prevention of violent extremism (PVE), representatives of national human rights commissions, national and local members of parliament, representatives of the United Nations and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), members of civil society, research institutes and think tanks, and individual experts.

Participants examined ways of preventing violent extremism by acting on its causes through a holistic approach to conventional weapons management, inspired in particular by (I) the **New Agenda for Peace**, proposed by the United Nations Secretary-General in July 2023, which prioritizes prevention and encourages Member States to integrate the control of small arms and light weapons into development and violence reduction activities, as well as into national prevention strategies; (II) the **African Union Vision 2063** “An Integrated, Prosperous and Peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena”; and (III) the **ECOWAS Vision 2050** “The ECOWAS of the Peoples: Peace and Prosperity for All”.

The overall observation is that the proliferation of conventional weapons, particularly small arms and light weapons, and violent extremism are spreading and continuing to have a negative impact on West African States. These two phenomena contribute to the deterioration of the security situation in the region, which in turn aggravates these phenomena, generating a vicious cycle. Despite efforts made at all levels, preventing the proliferation of conventional weapons and violent extremism sustainably remains a major challenge. This challenge is exacerbated by new weapons-related threats – such as improvised explosive devices – and the expansion of violent extremist groups from the central Sahel to the coastal States.

At the end of the rich exchanges between high-level experts, participants reached the following **conclusions and recommendations**, which they address to the States of the region, to regional, continental and international organizations, to civil society and to research entities:

1. There is an urgent need to prompt a change of approach in responses to armed violence: **a holistic approach to the management of conventional weapons, focused on prevention and centred on people and human security.** To this end, it is essential that all relevant stakeholders engage in a concerted manner and at all levels to address **the root causes of such violence**, i.e. the motivations underlying the use of weapons (“the demand”). For example, action can be taken to strengthen equality, social justice, good governance, effective management of natural resources, the protection of people’s diverse livelihoods, respect for human rights and access to fair justice, community security, respect for diversity and social cohesion, as well as development. This perspective on the demand for weapons complements **responses to address their origin and availability** (“the supply”).
2. To address armed violence effectively and sustainably from a prevention perspective, **more documented information** is needed – from research, civil society and the institutions responsible for conventional weapons management and PVE – both on the **“supply” of and “demand” for weapons.**
3. **Fora dedicated to multi-stakeholder dialogue and the exchange of good practice, at the local, national, regional, continental and international level, should be promoted** to foster a common understanding, among the various relevant stakeholders, of a holistic approach to conventional weapons management and its implementation. Relevant stakeholders include representatives from national institutions, parliamentarians, political parties, civil society, representatives of local communities – in particular religious and traditional leaders –, researchers, the media, and representatives of regional, continental and international organizations.

At the national and local level

4. It is essential to strengthen and institutionalize **cooperation and information sharing between national institutions responsible for conventional weapons management and those responsible for PVE**, with the contribution of other relevant public entities and other stakeholders such as civil society. These institutions have a pivotal role to play in promoting linkages between the two fields of action, with a view to fostering holistic and inclusive interventions.
5. **National strategic documents**, such as those addressing small arms and light weapons proliferation or PVE, are key tools for articulating, promoting and operationalizing the linkages between conventional weapons management and PVE. **Relevant national stakeholders are invited to act more systematically on these linkages** when developing or revising these documents, and to include integrated implementation measures in them.
6. It is vital to ensure and re-establish the **State’s sovereign role as the guarantor of the people’s security and its monopoly on legitimate violence.** At the same time, citizens and local communities, particularly on the outskirts of national territories, also have a role to play in the **co-production of their security**, although this does not mean arming them. Local security committees, civil-military dialogue and grassroots consultation are all ways of fostering both this co-production and trust between the State and its people.
7. It is also important to consider the management of conventional weapons in relation to **security sector governance**, in particular to prevent human rights violations and to improve the conditions of defence and security forces in relation to their professional exercise and social security, retraining and retirement, including through relevant laws (in particular military programming laws).

8. **Adequately securing national weapons stockpiles is key** to preventing the diversion of weapons to unauthorized users. Actions such as reinforcing armouries and bringing them up to standard, strengthening marking, record-keeping and tracing capacities, or training and recognizing the importance of specialized personnel, are essential.
9. The **role of women** in the prevention of armed violence and violent extremism, acknowledging their roles and specificities within communities, is essential. Taking into account the gender dimension in the prevention of armed violence, harnessing women's strength as agents of change and **including them meaningfully in decision-making and the formulation of implementation measures** are actions that need to be strengthened in conventional weapons management and PVE.
10. Particularly in relation to **youth, it is essential for both the national institutions** responsible for conventional weapons management and those responsible for PVE to **work on a culture of peace and offer alternatives to the use of weapons**. This is key to addressing the root causes of violence, through dialogue, awareness raising of the risks associated with weapons, education and vocational training, socio-economic integration into society, the implementation of deradicalization programmes and the transmission of civic values.
11. **Parliamentarians** are important players in the formulation of policies and legislation on the management of conventional weapons and PVE, and in promoting therein more systematically the links between these two fields of action. It is key that parliamentarians make full use of their oversight role and ensure all relevant stakeholders' accountability.
12. Frameworks and measures should be envisaged to enable **the State to control and oversee self-defence groups**, where they exist, including their positioning in legislative and structural frameworks at the national level, their training in respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, the management of their equipment, and the demobilization and retraining of their members, including through alternative economic opportunities or the employment of the most capable in local paramilitary security forces (community police, park rangers for water and forestry, security auxiliaries or private surveillance companies).
13. **Training** on the link between conventional weapons management and PVE should be developed for the various relevant stakeholders, such as national institutions in charge of weapons management and PVE, parliamentarians, civil society and the media. A holistic approach to weapons management and PVE should also be integrated into the training curricula of the defence and security forces and civil servants.
14. While national ownership is fundamental, **technical and financial support** to operationalize the linkages between conventional weapons management and PVE is essential. This support must be aligned with national and local needs and priorities.
15. **Local and national action must be at the heart** of preventing violent extremism and the proliferation of conventional weapons. Given the cross-border threat, **regional action is also essential**.

At the regional, continental and international level

16. Regional, continental and international organizations have an active role to play in more systematically **promoting a holistic, prevention-focused approach to conventional weapons management across regional, continental and international frameworks, policies and strategies** on weapons management and PVE. Support and advocacy efforts from civil society are also key in this regard.

17. Practices from the West Africa region should be instilled into regional, continental and international normative, political and strategic processes on conventional weapons management and PVE, such as the forthcoming Review Conference of the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons.
18. This seminar should be considered as the starting point for a **broader process**, anchored in the region and aimed at nurturing a **community of practice** to promote the exchange of experiences and good practices regarding the inclusion of conventional weapons management in PVE and vice versa, as well as to strengthen capacities. It could also prompt, within ECOWAS, the **establishment of a formal framework for regular meetings** between the national institutions responsible for the management of conventional weapons on the one hand and those responsible for PVE on the other. On the basis of an assessment of the existing national and regional frameworks for conventional weapons management and PVE and their interconnection, it would be desirable for ECOWAS to explore, in particular, the possibility of initiating a process to **elaborate regional guidelines** for ECOWAS Member States on taking account of weapons management in PVE and vice versa. It would subsequently be desirable for ECOWAS Member States to take ownership of and incorporate these potential regional guidelines into their respective national legal frameworks.

The participants invite the States of the region, regional, continental and international organizations as well as civil society and research entities to take ownership of the conclusions and recommendations of the seminar.

(Drafted in Lomé, 7 December 2023)



1. Introduction

1.1 Context

The underlying drivers of armed violence differ depending on the context. Despite being a complex phenomenon, armed violence is nevertheless always characterized by the use of weapons. In recent years, local and cross-border conflicts in West Africa have evolved and multiplied through the creation of armed groups, particularly violent extremist groups, which have spread from the central Sahel to the coastal States of the Gulf of Guinea. The presence and proliferation of conventional weapons and ammunition drives this trend.²

Responses to this rise in armed violence and violent extremism in West Africa have above all centred on military and security measures. Not only do such responses tend to fuel an increase in armed violence and an arms race, but they also tend to become accepted as the primary way to manage conflict. In this context, it seems that the role of conventional weapons, whether legal or illicit, has not, until now, been sufficiently considered. However, the interconnection between the prevention of violent extremism (PVE), and weapons and ammunition management (WAM) presents a genuine opportunity for those working towards peace and violence prevention, whether through public policy or practice. This observation also aligns with the growing recognition within the United Nations, other intergovernmental bodies and States of the urgent need to take a different approach to tackling armed violence.

1.2 About the seminar

The Peace and Human Rights Division of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) and the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC) organized the “Regional seminar on the prevention of violent extremism and the management of conventional weapons in West Africa”, from 5 to 7 December 2023 in Lomé, Togo.

Its main aim was to strengthen the contribution of WAM to PVE – and vice versa – in West Africa, and to thereby instigate a sustainable joined-up approach across these areas. With this in mind, the **specific objectives** of the seminar were to:

- ▶ Create a forum for discussing the intersecting issues affecting both PVE and WAM and for taking stock of the normative and policy frameworks, institutions and practices at the national, regional and international levels;

² For simplicity, the term “conventional weapons” is used throughout this report to include ammunition. Similarly, the report also uses the term “weapons and ammunition management” (WAM).

- ▶ Promote ownership of the concept of PVE and prompt the adoption of new approaches to WAM that take better account of the factors fuelling the demand for weapons;
- ▶ Identify opportunities, good practices and needs with a view to developing practical recommendations aimed at consolidating national and regional frameworks for WAM and PVE; and
- ▶ Foster the sharing of experience between the prevention and disarmament communities to consolidate the focus on the links between WAM and PVE at the national and regional levels, and to advance the emergence of an interdisciplinary community of practice.

To achieve these objectives, seminar participants focused their discussions on the following **key questions**:

- ▶ How can work on WAM serve PVE efforts, including as a forum for dialogue?
- ▶ Can this work support policymakers in reconsidering the current approach to the arms race and the militarization of our societies as a response to violent extremism?
- ▶ What are the political, social, economic, security and cultural drivers of the acquisition, possession, transfer, trafficking and use of conventional weapons?
- ▶ How can we offer communities alternatives to reduce the demand for weapons while guaranteeing their security?
- ▶ How can peace education and raising awareness of the risks of using weapons promote alternatives to a military response?

The seminar brought together over 60 participants from some fifteen West African countries: senior officials in public administrations responsible for WAM or PVE, representatives of national human rights commissions, national and local members of parliament, representatives of the United Nations (UN) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), members of civil society, research institutes and think tanks, and individual experts. The seminar addressed a major gap by bringing together experts in WAM on the one hand and PVE on the other. Although they work on the same challenges, these two communities of experts know little about one another and there is scarcely any collaboration between them, even between the national institutions responsible for these two areas.

Methodologically, the regional seminar sought to facilitate the sharing of experiences. To this end, participants were encouraged to actively ask themselves and each other questions, to learn from one another and to collectively consider the links between WAM and PVE, from a holistic perspective and within the broader conceptual context of human security, the rule of law, the prevention of armed violence, peacebuilding and development. The seminar consisted of plenary sessions and group work. The group work supported participants to share their practical experience, identify points of convergence and co-create concrete actions. With the exception of the opening statements, the seminar was subject to the “Chatham House rule” (i.e. the information shared may be used, but not attributed to any specific participant).

This report summarizes the key points of the discussions held during the seminar. The next section summarizes the main points made in the opening statements. The third section summarizes the key points of the substantive discussions and is followed by the conclusion.



2. Opening Statements

Togo's Minister of Territorial Administration, Decentralization and Territorial Development, Minister Hodabalo Awaté, opened the seminar. He stressed that it is important for peacebuilding experts to consider the intersection between PVE and WAM, pointing out that responses, which are essentially military and security in nature, were contributing to an increase in armed violence. In particular, he noted that it is “increasingly recognized today that arms control can be an essential component of the prevention of conflict and armed violence, and that it must form part of a fresh and innovative approach.” Lastly, the Minister assured the organizers of the Togolese Government's commitment and full readiness to work together with neighbouring countries through active diplomacy to ensure that PVE take greater account of WAM, and vice versa.

The opening ceremony also featured three other statements. The first was delivered by the Director of UNREC, Mr Nahmtante Anselme Yabouri, who expressed his delight at hosting a meeting of such importance for peace and security in West Africa, a prerequisite for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He noted that West Africa had witnessed a worrying increase in conflicts in recent years, facilitated by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW), as well as improvised explosive devices (IEDs): “There is therefore an urgent need to immediately begin work on integrating PVE into the management of SALW and ammunition, which are proliferating on the continent.” He went on to emphasize: “While we might be talking about small arms, we are still talking

about a big threat! A big threat to human security! A big threat to peace, democracy and the rule of law! A big threat to development! A big threat to the achievement of the SDGs!”

This was followed by the statement of the Deputy Head of Mission of the Swiss Embassy in Ghana, Togo and Benin, Ms Simone Haeberli, who noted that the seminar aligned perfectly with the FDFA’s programme on the prevention of violence and violent extremism, launched in 2015. She highlighted the need to strengthen social bonds through dialogue at all levels. She stressed that “the drivers and factors underlying the use of weapons must be properly taken into account to sustainably prevent armed violence. That’s why we wanted to bring together experts in weapons management and their counterparts in PVE, to foster, through their discussions, a shared understanding of the links between PVE and weapons management and the exchange of good practice.”

Finally, in her statement, UNIDIR Deputy Director Dr Cécile Aptel noted that, according to research, the sustainable and effective prevention of armed violence requires holistic approaches that address both the supply of weapons and the demand for them. For these holistic approaches to be truly effective, they must be developed through “a process of co-creation by the various thematic experts”, hence the importance of building links between all relevant stakeholders. She went on to highlight the UN Secretary-General’s vision for a New Agenda for Peace, in which he calls for better integration between SALW control and prevention strategies and the adoption of holistic responses to armed violence. According to Dr Aptel, the seminar is therefore part of ongoing and far-reaching multilateral discussions to which it will make a substantial contribution, particularly in the run-up to the Summit of the Future due to take place in September 2024.³

3 The Summit of the Future will be a high-level event, bringing world leaders together in September 2024 to forge a new international consensus and decide together how to deliver a better present and safeguard the future. The aim of the Summit is twofold: accelerate efforts to meet existing international commitments and take concrete steps to respond to emerging challenges. To this end, UN Member States are expected to adopt an action-oriented outcome document called the Pact for the Future. See: <https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future>

3. Summary of discussions

This section summarizes the key points raised during the following [four main seminar discussion sessions](#):

- ▶ Context and challenges relating to the proliferation of conventional weapons and armed violence in West Africa;
- ▶ Holistic approaches to the prevention of violent extremism, considering the supply of and demand for conventional weapons;
- ▶ Reflection on prevention-focused solutions and measures at the national level, based on conventional weapons management; and
- ▶ Reflection on prevention-focused solutions and measures at the regional, continental and international levels, based on conventional weapons management.

This section also draws, where relevant, on the exchanges that framed the four main discussion sessions: an introductory session that looked at the national contexts of Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Togo; a session on the food-for-thought paper that served as the basis for the seminar; and finally a roundtable discussion for participants to share concrete actions that they plan to undertake or promote as a result of the seminar.

3.1 Context and challenges relating to the proliferation of conventional weapons and armed violence in West Africa

Addressing the context and challenges related to the proliferation of conventional weapons and armed violence, participants examined the nature of weapons, their proliferation, as well as how and from where they are acquired. They also discussed emerging trends related to weapons and violent extremism, and finally considered key reasons for which people join violent extremist groups.

Seminar participants noted that the conventional weapons used in West Africa are mainly SALW, including man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS), and IEDs. Their discussions focused on the proliferation of illicit weapons. In particular, [two types of sources of illicit weapons](#) were identified:

- ▶ The acquisition of illegal weapons, especially craft weapons produced by unauthorized manufacturers, or converted weapons; and
- ▶ The diversion of legal weapons to the illicit sphere. This can include weapons diverted during a legal transfer, diverted or stolen from national stockpiles, or captured during attacks on the arsenals of defence and security forces (DSF) or peacekeeping operations.

Regarding the networks through which illicit weapons proliferate, participants noted the existence of national and regional, as well as international channels, which generally reflect those used for cross-border crime. This movement of weapons is facilitated by porous borders, ineffective management of cross-border areas, corruption and inadequate management of weapons stockpiles. According to the discussions, the majority of illicit weapons originate from a legal source. It has been estimated that more than 40 million small arms – almost 80% of the small arms in circulation in Africa – are held by civilians, including non-state armed groups, while DSF are thought to hold fewer than 11 million.⁴ The effects of this reality extend beyond the security situation in West Africa. The discussions highlighted the risk of West Africa becoming a source of weapons that fuels conflict in other regions.

During their discussions on the nature of weapons proliferation and violent extremist groups in the region, participants also highlighted **emerging trends** that they felt merited further attention beyond the seminar:

- ▶ The geographical expansion of violent extremist groups, particularly towards the coastal countries of the Gulf of Guinea;
- ▶ The emergence of certain armed actors, especially militias or self-defence groups (see Box 3);
- ▶ The increasing proliferation and use of certain types of weapons by violent extremist groups, in particular IEDs and, increasingly, drones;
- ▶ The increased production and quality of craft weapons in the regions; and
- ▶ The change in the doctrine of violent extremist groups, according to which members must now obtain their own weapons, following the maxim “leave for an attack light, come back heavy”, i.e. loaded with weapons captured from opposing forces.

Furthermore, the discussions examined the different motivations that drive people to join violent extremist groups. In particular, **four types of motivation** were identified:

- ▶ Political and socio-economic motivations linked in particular to problems relating to governance, social injustice, the absence of the State and a lack of basic social services;
- ▶ Ideological and religious motivations which, although seemingly less important, should not be overlooked;
- ▶ “Reactive” motivations linked to violence suffered, including at the hands of DSF, or to a lack of confidence in DSF; and
- ▶ “Protective” motivations linked to a need for self-defence or to protect one’s family, community, property or livelihood.

Overall, the discussions revealed that the appeal of violent extremist groups can also be linked to a need to belong. This plays an important role, particularly in the recruitment of young people and women. Participants noted that universities and schools have become new recruitment grounds for violent extremist groups. Particular attention should be paid to the concerns of young people.

⁴ Nicolas Florquin, Sigrid Lipott, Francis Wairagu, Weapons Compass: Mapping Illicit Small Arms Flows in Africa (Small Arms Survey and African Union Commission, 2019), 31.

On the question of gender, participants raised the fact that women often join violent extremist groups under duress or for fear of reprisals. They are therefore victims of these groups. In some cases, violent extremist groups (such as Boko Haram) kidnap young girls from schools or unguarded villages in order to exploit them. However, it was also noted that, in other cases, women join violent extremist groups in response to a feeling of inequality, to prove that they are capable of playing a role equivalent to that of men, or in search of recognition and power. It was also recognized that women are playing an increasingly active role in violent extremism.

In addition, seminar participants underlined the fact that violent extremist groups take advantage of land disputes and exploit existing inter-community tensions. Here, the impact of climate change was also noted, given that it affects communities' livelihoods and makes them more susceptible to joining violent extremist groups. This seems to be particularly the case for transhumant farmers, for example.

Finally, participants agreed that the proliferation of conventional weapons and violent extremism are cross-border threats. They observed that local and national action should be at the heart of interventions to prevent these scourges, but that it should also be accompanied by international cooperation. In reality, no government can deal with these threats alone or in isolation. Regional and international action is therefore essential (see Section 3.4).



3.2 Holistic approaches to the prevention of violent extremism, considering the supply of and demand for conventional weapons

Participants considered the supply of and demand for conventional weapons with a view to developing a holistic approach to PVE. The discussions also focused on concrete measures that could be undertaken to this end.

The exchanges revealed that the abundant supply of weapons, primarily SALW, significantly undermines efforts to achieve peace and security in West Africa. It was recognized that the availability and proliferation of weapons facilitates armed violence, since it gives its perpetrators the means to act. If violent extremist groups are denied weapons, they are deprived of the means to cause harm. As one participant put it: “It is incredible that we have not made enough of the link between PVE and WAM before now.”

The discussions reaffirmed that effective measures to manage weapons and ammunition could help prevent violent extremism, particularly by targeting illicit arms flows. Securing DSF weapons stockpiles and ensuring that they comply with relevant international standards would make a significant contribution to such efforts, as illustrated by the case of Sierra Leone. Participants also discussed the professionalization of the armed forces, through training for example, and the importance of recognizing the role of weapons storage personnel, to minimize the frustrations that can lead to weapons being diverted. On this point, it was suggested that WAM should be incorporated into security sector governance, to ensure DSF are adequately trained, prepared and supported in this area. The importance of systematic marking and record-keeping of weapons held by DSF and civilians, including members of self-defence groups and militias, was also mentioned several times. Such measures should be paired with capacities to trace weapons. Participants also discussed the benefits of offering socio-economic alternatives to craft weapons producers, as has been done in Sierra Leone. Finally, they underscored the importance of promoting the voluntary surrender of weapons.

Participants noted that the security situation was not improving overall in areas where people were arming themselves, and may in fact be deteriorating. They agreed that it was essential to address the sources and availability of weapons (the supply side) – which is currently prioritized over other approaches – but that doing so is not sufficient to prevent the root causes of violence. They therefore stressed the importance of offering alternatives to the use of weapons. As such, discussions focused on the need to better understand and act on the societal drivers underlying the demand for weapons. As a result, the seminar recognized that a holistic approach that acts on both the supply of and demand for weapons is required to sustainably reduce armed violence.

On this point, participants noted that the demand for weapons is growing in West Africa, but that it has been studied and documented far less than the supply side, and that more research is therefore required. Participants highlighted the following **five common drivers of the demand for weapons**:

- ▶ Social drivers linked to tensions and conflict between socio-economic groups (e.g. between farmers and transhumant herders, whose lifestyles and livelihoods are often at odds);
- ▶ Economic drivers, given that crime may represent an opportunity or livelihood;
- ▶ Cultural drivers linked to the traditional significance of owning a weapon (especially as a symbol of power) or to hunting activities;
- ▶ Security-related drivers emanating from a need for self-defence and to protect families or communities (in contexts where the State is seen as failing to protect its citizens, there is often a feeling of insecurity, which fuels the arms race and the demand for weapons in particular); and
- ▶ Political drivers fuelled by the physical or structural violence exercised by the State in a general context of a breakdown in the relationship between the State and the people.

Discussing how the demand for weapons could be reduced in greater depth, participants emphasized the need to act on the root causes of violence. Noting that there is a crisis of confidence between the State and the people, which encourages the use of weapons against the State, they agreed that it is imperative to rebuild lost trust. The exchanges on this topic focused on the following **potential ways to do this**:

- ▶ Implementing measures to promote development and social cohesion, strengthen people's livelihoods, guarantee the security of people and property, reduce people's feelings of abandonment and strengthen good governance, including of natural resources (see Box 2). Ways to deliver social justice, access to equitable justice and respect for human rights were also discussed;
- ▶ Valuing the role of individuals as active agents of prevention, in particular young people and women, through their socio-economic integration and empowerment, for example (see Box 2);
- ▶ Raising awareness of violent extremism and the risk posed by the proliferation of weapons in border areas. This has been done in several countries in the region, including Côte d'Ivoire, whose efforts in this area served as a case study;
- ▶ Improving the relationship between civilians and the military by promoting joint civilian and military activities (CMA) and free medical assistance in the field. This could take the form of quick-impact projects delivered by DSF that meet people's needs. Such projects could contribute to the government's work to further socio-economic development, following the examples of Benin and Senegal;
- ▶ Promoting a culture of peace, good citizenship and education on non-violence, particularly among young people. Côte d'Ivoire's National Civic Service Office, which aims to educate young people on civic-mindedness and citizenship, was identified as a good example of this;
- ▶ Raising awareness and promoting incentives for the voluntary surrender of weapons (such as development projects, micro-projects or the creation of community infrastructure) and providing alternatives to the possession of weapons. Participants considered the example of Côte d'Ivoire's disarmament programme based on the implementation of income-generating activities or support for community projects; and

- ▶ Setting up mechanisms to promote people's security and dialogue. The discussions identified a number of good practices, including the establishment of cross-border security and monitoring committees and armed violence observatories, such as those set up in Côte d'Ivoire. Institutions that work for dialogue and the peaceful resolution of conflicts were also mentioned, such as Ghana's National Peace Council, along with those providing communities with the tools they need to prevent violence, manage conflicts peacefully and resist violent extremism, such as Togo's Interministerial Committee for Preventing and Combating Violent Extremism (CIPLEV) and its local branches.

Box 2: Individual human capital and development as key prevention measures

Participants discussed the relevance of measures such as socio-economic integration, individual empowerment and, more broadly, development as key ways to counter the root causes of violence and, therefore, the demand for weapons. Several **practical examples** were considered in greater detail:

- ▶ Côte d'Ivoire has implemented a "Special programme to combat fragility in northern border areas". This programme is specifically designed to respond to the terrorist threat in the north of the country. To prevent young people in this region from joining jihadist groups, they are offered job opportunities and support to set up their own businesses;
- ▶ Senegal is running an "Emergency programme to modernize border routes and areas". This programme aims to respond to the urgent need to properly and immediately address the legitimate concerns of people living in sensitive regions of Senegal;
- ▶ Benin has drawn up a national policy for the development of border areas and a corresponding implementation programme. Its vision is to turn border areas into genuine areas of sustainable development and good relations with neighbouring countries, where people's living conditions will be improved significantly; and
- ▶ The "Emergency programme for the Savanes region" is a development programme implemented by the Togolese government to support the Savanes region, which has a high level of violent extremism and attacks by extremist groups. The programme aims to build health centres and classrooms, upgrade rural roads, install boreholes, extend the electricity supply network and create planned agricultural development zones.



3.3 Reflection on prevention-focused solutions and measures at the national level, based on conventional weapons management

With a view to strengthening the integration of WAM and PVE at the national level, participants addressed the existing strategic documents and national institutions in these two areas. They also explored solutions and measures to enhance the mutual incorporation of WAM and PVE across the respective strategic documents and institutions. Participants discussed which stakeholders were best positioned to deliver a holistic approach to WAM and PVE. Finally, they discussed WAM and PVE in local realities and communities.

The discussions on the strategic documents – national policies, strategies or action plans – indicated that ECOWAS countries usually do have such documents on WAM. However, these documents do not typically consider PVE. On the other hand, some countries, such as Togo, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, have drawn up strategic plans and/or policies on PVE, that do not mention WAM. Participants therefore suggested that more should be made of the links between WAM and PVE when drawing up or revising these strategic documents, and that integrated measures should be developed based on them.

At the institutional level, participants recognized that the national commissions responsible for tackling the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (NATCOMs) and the institutions responsible for PVE can play a pivotal role in promoting and implementing a holistic approach to WAM and PVE. It likewise emerged from the discussions that most of the countries in the region have set up both NATCOMs and institutions responsible for PVE, but that there is barely any (or indeed no) institutionalized dialogue between these two sets of institutions, despite them working on the same challenges. Mindful of this, participants underscored the importance of establishing interinstitutional dialogue with a view to sharing more information, strengthening collaboration and pooling efforts.

The discussions indicated that PVE is a fairly new concept and one with which NATCOMs are not sufficiently familiar. Participants therefore called for capacity-building on the links between WAM and PVE for the national commissions and institutions responsible for these areas. In the same spirit, it was noted that PVE is not included in the mandates of NATCOMs and that WAM is not included in the mandates of the national institutions responsible for PVE. Given that the mandates of NATCOMs are based on the ECOWAS convention on SALW, some participants suggested that the convention should be updated to incorporate PVE. This would also harmonize approaches at the regional level. The discussions revealed that the mandates of some institutions had been extended in practice. This is the case, for example, for Côte d'Ivoire's national SALW commission, which has been mandated to help raise awareness about PVE.

Participants also discussed the various stakeholders that could support prevention efforts through WAM at the national level. Participants agreed that an inclusive approach is essential and that it is up to the national institutions responsible for WAM and PVE (which are themselves key actors) to involve all relevant stakeholders. Every stakeholder will have something to bring to the table. Participants identified a number of specific roles for the following stakeholders:

- ▶ **Governments/public administrations:** create regulatory frameworks to deliver collective security and guarantee human security; develop, revise and update national frameworks on WAM and PVE and the links between them; deliver social services and monitor their effectiveness;
- ▶ **NATCOMs/institutions responsible for PVE:** serve as a platform for stakeholders to discuss an integrated approach to and cooperation on WAM and PVE; cooperate actively to identify and act more effectively on the links between WAM and PVE;
- ▶ **DSF:** anticipate attacks by violent extremist groups; build public confidence in DSF; engage with civilian actors to work together for security. All of these measures will enable DSF to play a major role in prevention;
- ▶ **Members of parliament:** monitor government action and advocate on WAM and PVE in national assemblies; pass effective laws on WAM and PVE and promote links between these two areas; allocate the budgetary resources needed to tackle countries' high vulnerability to violent extremism;
- ▶ **Political parties:** help educate the public about active and responsible citizenship; raise public awareness about the legal possession of weapons;
- ▶ **Civil society:** play a role in awareness-raising, advocacy, monitoring and oversight with regard to WAM and PVE; facilitate constructive dialogue between WAM and PVE stakeholders; support data collection and analyze the interconnection between WAM and PVE;
- ▶ **The media:** help establish a narrative of peace to counter the rhetoric of violent extremist groups, and thereby contribute to peace education and civic-mindedness; and
- ▶ **Women and young people:** encourage families and communities to change their response to the risks posed by armed violence and violent extremism; play an active role in decision-making on WAM and PVE.

In addition to these actors, the seminar also recognized the key role of national human rights institutions, local community representatives, the research community and think tanks in promoting a holistic approach to WAM and PVE.

Box 3: WAM and PVE in local realities and communities

The seminar took a cross-cutting approach to WAM and PVE in local communities and realities. Participants highlighted the emergence of self-defence groups as armed actors. It was suggested that there are common interests between communities threatened by violent extremists and governments who may face challenges in ensuring the full protection of such communities. It was also noted that in particularly complex contexts, some governments are tempted to delegate their sovereign duty to ensure public security to other actors operating in the same territories as violent extremists. Some participants remarked that the creation and activities of these self-defence groups can risk increasing the circulation and proliferation of weapons, aggravating and prolonging armed violence and leading to human rights violations and abuses, and violations of international humanitarian law. Participants discussed the importance of having an effective legislative and regulatory framework to govern these groups, where they exist. Fundamentally, the seminar reaffirmed the State's sovereign duty to guarantee public safety and its monopoly on legitimate violence.

Participants also stressed the importance of addressing communities' feeling of insecurity (see also Section 3.2). Turning to the case of Burkina Faso in particular, the exchanges highlighted the existence of traditional practices that foster shared security. Good examples of such practices include alternative conflict resolution mechanisms, in particular endogenous mechanisms (such as committees of elders in some villages that arbitrate disputes or reconcile different positions). However, it emerged that these mechanisms tend to be replaced by the use of weapons, which are becoming the sole means of resolving conflict or responding to insecurity. With this in mind, seminar participants suggested that customary and traditional methods and mechanisms for peaceful conflict resolution should be strengthened. Participants also discussed the critical role of traditional and religious leaders in raising awareness on PVE measures and on the risks of possessing, manufacturing, using and trafficking weapons. The active engagement of Sierra Leone's traditional leaders in such activities was cited as an example.

Moreover, participants noted the challenge of empowering citizens to co-produce their security, particularly in areas where insecurity is particularly acute. This does not mean arming them, but rather putting in place, for example, a permanent guard, community policing and channels for circulating information at the community level, both horizontally among citizens and vertically from citizens to traditional leaders, local elected representatives and local public officials. It was also recognized that citizens and communities can play an active role in identifying the root causes of violence and proposing ways to address them. Local consultation frameworks (such as security and/or peace committees) are ideal fora for this type of participation and for building trust.

Participants felt that NATCOMs and the institutions responsible for PVE should work together in synergy at the local level. By doing so, these institutions could help to establish channels for communication and dialogue.



3.4 Reflection on prevention-focused solutions and measures at the regional, continental and international levels, based on conventional weapons management

To strengthen the integration of WAM and PVE at the regional, continental and international levels, participants examined the relevant normative, strategic and policy frameworks in these areas. The discussions also aimed to highlight solutions, measures and stakeholders that could help join up these frameworks and the resulting practice.

Participants considered the major frameworks governing WAM and PVE at the regional, continental and international levels. Their large number bears witness to the political will of governments and regional, continental and international institutions to tackle the proliferation of conventional weapons and violent extremism (see Box 4 for a non-exhaustive overview of relevant frameworks).⁵ The importance of these

⁵ Given the regional scope of the seminar, it is worth mentioning other relevant frameworks in the region that could not be discussed due to time constraints: Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security (1999); ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (2008); ECOWAS Regional Action Plan on Illicit Drug Trafficking and Organised Crime (2009). It is also worth mentioning the existence of the Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa (created in 2000), which is not a framework but a mechanism.

frameworks is undeniable: they inspire national strategic documents and national efforts are largely based on them. They are therefore essential for strengthening the links between WAM and PVE. The discussions indicated that most of the relevant normative, strategic and policy documents fail to fully recognize, articulate or take action on the links between WAM and PVE. With some rare exceptions, these documents are therefore implemented in silos, which may undermine their effectiveness and impact. Nevertheless, participants considered that regional, continental and international frameworks provide a solid foundation for developing programmes and guidance to strengthen the links between WAM and PVE.

Box 4: Non-exhaustive overview of relevant regional, continental and international frameworks on WAM and PVE

- ▶ UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (2001);
- ▶ ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Materials (2006);
- ▶ UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2006);
- ▶ African Union (AU) Strategy on the Control of the Illicit Proliferation, Circulation and Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons (2011);
- ▶ ECOWAS Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2013);
- ▶ ECOWAS political declaration and common position against terrorism adopted in Yamoussoukro (2013);
- ▶ AU initiative “Silencing the Guns by 2020” adopted in 2013, the deadline for which has been extended to 2030;
- ▶ Arms Trade Treaty (2013);
- ▶ UN Secretary-General’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (2015);
- ▶ UN Security Council Resolution 2370 on preventing terrorists from acquiring weapons or the means to produce them (2017);
- ▶ ECOWAS 2020–2024 Priority Action Plan to Eradicate Terrorism in the ECOWAS Region (2019);
- ▶ Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management (2023); and
- ▶ UN Secretary-General’s New Agenda for Peace (2023).

At the international level, the UN Secretary General’s New Agenda for Peace was repeatedly identified as a new reference document that explicitly addresses the links between WAM and PVE. Recognizing WAM as a key component of efforts to prevent conflict and violence and achieve lasting peace, the Agenda underscores the importance of reducing the human cost of weapons by abandoning overly securitized approaches and promoting people-centred disarmament. The Secretary-General instead

recommends strengthening, developing and implementing measures to counter the diversion or proliferation of SALW (i.e. acting on the supply of weapons), as well as adopting holistic approaches that integrate SALW management into development and violence reduction activities, among others, and into national prevention strategies (i.e. acting on the demand for weapons).⁶

Regarding the continental level, participants stressed the relevance of the AU's Silencing the Guns initiative. They highlighted the opportunity this initiative presents to promote and implement a holistic approach to WAM and PVE across the continent.

On this point, the seminar also highlighted the benefits of feeding the discussions and good practices from the region into relevant continental and international processes, thereby strengthening such processes. In particular, participants identified the Fourth Review Conference of the UN Programme of Action on SALW, due to be held in June 2024 in New York, as an excellent opportunity to highlight the relevance of the links between SALW management and PVE, as well as the need to improve coordination between the normative, strategic and policy frameworks in these two areas.

Focusing on West Africa, participants agreed that there was an emerging awareness in the region of the importance of PVE (and its link to weapons), but that it was not yet commensurate to the threat and needed to be strengthened considerably. They noted, for example, that ECOWAS continues to pay greater attention to WAM than PVE, while acknowledging that efforts to rebalance its approach are under way, notably through the ECOWAS 2020–2024 Priority Action Plan to Eradicate Terrorism in the Region. However, participants lamented the fact that funding challenges were hindering the implementation of this action plan.

The seminar proposed two possible ways to strengthen the links between WAM and PVE at the regional level. Firstly, many participants highlighted the relevance of a regional process aimed at systematically reviewing existing WAM and PVE frameworks and practices in the region, and the links between them. This review could be used to develop regional guidelines on how to integrate WAM and PVE. This process was seen as an important step towards operationalizing the links between WAM and PVE, and harmonizing approaches at the regional level. Participants identified ECOWAS as an important actor in this respect and would welcome ECOWAS playing a role in the WAM-PVE agenda. The second approach formulated by some participants to strengthen relevant frameworks involved reflecting PVE in the ECOWAS convention on SALW should the convention come up for review.

During the exchanges, it emerged that WAM and PVE stakeholders currently meet in distinct fora at the West Africa regional level. Participants acknowledged that there are no bridges between these

6 UN Member States have invited the Secretary-General to contribute to preparations for the Summit of the Future (see note 3) in the form of practical recommendations. The Secretary-General's Policy Brief on a New Agenda for Peace is one such contribution. See: United Nations, Our Common Agenda. Policy Brief 9: A New Agenda for Peace, presented by the Secretary-General on 20 July 2023, <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-new-agenda-for-peace-en.pdf>

areas and their relevant stakeholders, despite the links between them being evident. The discussions highlighted the existence of regional fora that could effectively support the creation of such bridges, for instance the annual meeting between the ECOWAS Commission and NATCOMs in the region or the West African Police Chiefs Committee under the aegis of the ECOWAS Commission. However, these fora are not yet being used for this purpose. Participants therefore underscored the benefit of the seminar in addressing these two areas in tandem. They agreed on the relevance of creating more regional, continental and international bridges connecting WAM and PVE, both in terms of cooperating across relevant frameworks and of sharing experience and knowledge between communities of practice. In this respect, it was noted that regional organizations in particular, but also continental and international organizations, can play a central role in promoting a holistic approach to WAM and PVE.

Finally, participants discussed the role of international partners. The technical and financial support of these partners was considered central to the implementation of commitments on WAM and PVE, and establishing the links between them. Participants likewise stressed the importance of national ownership and of aligning all support with the priorities and needs of the recipient country. Here, participants noted the funds available for the implementation of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and international funding instruments in the area of arms control, in particular the UN Trust Facility Supporting Cooperation on Arms Regulation (UNSCAR) or the Arms Trade Treaty Voluntary Trust Fund. They placed particular emphasis on the Saving Lives Entity (SALIENT) funding window created in 2019 within the UN Peacebuilding Fund. This new instrument supports efforts to reduce armed violence through a holistic, sustainable and multi-sectoral approach that addresses both the supply of and demand for weapons, placing national ownership at the heart of interventions. African countries supported by SALIENT include South Sudan, Cameroon and Ghana.



4. Conclusion

The “Regional seminar on the prevention of violent extremism and the management of conventional weapons in West Africa”, held in December 2023 in Lomé, was innovative and pioneering in its approach. It was the first time that these two areas had been addressed holistically. The seminar succeeded in building bridges and initiating exchanges between experts from the two communities of practice, who, in reality, still interact very little, if at all, but whose collaboration is vital to sustainably and effectively prevent armed violence. The candid, constructive and practical exchanges confirmed the need for and added value of such a platform for dialogue. They also demonstrated that it is possible to make progress in the complex political and security context of the West Africa region.

The seminar and the participants’ conclusions and recommendations (see Box 1) bear witness to the relevance, urgency and value of investing more in WAM and PVE in the region, based on a holistic approach that capitalizes on the interconnection between these two areas. Participants therefore called on the various stakeholders, such as technical and financial partners (including the Swiss FDFA, UNIDIR and UNREC), institutional partners (including regional and continental organizations, and national institutions responsible for WAM and PVE), and other key stakeholders, such as national human rights commissions, parliamentarians, civil society and the research sector, to make greater efforts to promote a joined-up approach. Participants identified specific courses of action at the local, national, regional, continental and international levels. It is now up to all relevant actors to capitalize on, sustain and carry forward the achievements of the seminar.

The discussions and emerging practices – aimed at harnessing the links between WAM and PVE in West Africa – and the seminar itself can serve as an inspiration for other regions. Moreover, they should be viewed as an innovative and concrete contribution to ongoing multilateral discussions at the regional, continental and international levels. As such, opportunities for intergovernmental negotiations, such as the Summit of the Future, the Review Conference of the UN Programme of Action on SALW, and the African Counter-Terrorism Summit, will be crucial in 2024.

The three seminar organizers welcome the richness of contributions by participants from across the West Africa region and are delighted with the results of the seminar. They remain committed to a change in approach: a more holistic, prevention-focused approach to WAM, centred on people and human security.

Annex - Selection of useful resources

Selection of relevant normative, strategic and policy frameworks:

- ▶ United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, adopted on 20 July 2001 [https://www.un.org/events/smallarms2006/pdf/192.15%20\(E\).pdf](https://www.un.org/events/smallarms2006/pdf/192.15%20(E).pdf)
- ▶ United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, adopted by the General Assembly on 8 September 2006 <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/60/288>
- ▶ ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Materials, adopted on 14 June 2006 <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/research/disarmament/dualuse/pdf-archive-att/pdfs/ecowas-convention-on-small-arms-and-light-weapons-their-ammunition-and-other-related-materials.pdf>
- ▶ African Union Strategy on the Control of the Illicit Proliferation, Circulation and Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons, adopted by the Executive Council of the African Union in 2011 <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/au-strategy-en.pdf>
- ▶ ECOWAS political declaration and common position against terrorism, adopted on 28 February 2013 <https://ecowas.int/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/POLITICAL-DECLARATION-ENG..pdf>
- ▶ ECOWAS counter-terrorism strategy and implementation plan, adopted on 28 February 2013 <https://ecowas.int/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/IMPLEMENTATION-PLAN-CT.pdf>
- ▶ Arms Trade Treaty, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in April 2013 and entered into force on 24 December 2014 <https://thearmstradetreaty.org/treaty-text.html>
- ▶ United Nations Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (2015), presented by the Secretary-General on 24 December 2015 <https://undocs.org/en/A/70/674>
- ▶ African Union Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by Year 2020 (Lusaka Master Roadmap), adopted in 2016 https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/38304-doc-1_au_roadmap_silencing_guns_2020_pdf_en.pdf
- ▶ UN Security Council Resolution 2370 on preventing terrorists from acquiring weapons or the means to produce them, adopted by the Security Council on 2 August 2017 [https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2370\(2017\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2370(2017))
- ▶ Office for Disarmament Affairs, "Securing Our Common Future – An Agenda for Disarmament" (2018) <https://www.un.org/disarmament/sg-agenda/en>
- ▶ ECOWAS 2020–2024 Priority Action Plan to Eradicate Terrorism in the ECOWAS Region, adopted by the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government on 14 September 2019 https://www.remo-psd-soudir.org/english_version.pdf
- ▶ United Nations, Our Common Agenda. Policy Brief 9: A New Agenda for Peace, presented by the Secretary-General on 20 July 2023 <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-new-agenda-for-peace-en.pdf>
- ▶ Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 4 December 2023 <https://undocs.org/en/A/78/111>

Selection of relevant publications:

- ▶ Bárbara Morais Figueiredo, The Use of Uncrewed Aerial Systems by Non-State Armed Groups: Exploring Trends in Africa (UNIDIR, Geneva, 2024) [UNIDIR_Use_of_Uncrewed_Aerial_Systems_by_Non_State_Armed_Groups_Africa.pdf](https://www.unidir.org/publication/unidir-use-of-uncrewed-aerial-systems-by-non-state-armed-groups-africa)
- ▶ United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, Reference Guide: Developing National and Regional Action Plans to Prevent Violent Extremism (UNOCT, New York, 2018) https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/unoct_pverreferenceguide_final.pdf
- ▶ Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Preventing violence: the urgent need of alternative responses – Seven years of commitment by Switzerland and its partners (Swiss FDFA, Bern, 2023) https://www.eda.admin.ch/content/dam/eda/en/documents/aussenpolitik/frieden/preventing-violence_EN.pdf
- ▶ Documentary film: Prevention of violence: the urgent need of alternative responses – Seven years of commitment by Switzerland and its partners (Swiss FDFA, Bern, 2023) <https://youtu.be/a2GhVDC9gcU>
- ▶ Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, Improving our Understanding of the Role of Defense and Security Forces in the Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) in West Africa Synthesis Report (FDFA and Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, Bern/Geneva, 2022) https://www.eda.admin.ch/content/dam/eda/en/documents/aussenpolitik/frieden/role-of-defence-and-security-forces_EN.pdf
- ▶ Nicolas Florquin, Sigrid Lipott, Francis Wairagu, Weapons Compass: Mapping Illicit Small Arms Flows in Africa (Small Arms Survey and African Union Commission, 2019) <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-AU-Weapons-Compass.pdf>
- ▶ Johanna Kleffmann, Francesca Batault, Juan Armando Torres Munguía, Siobhan O’Neil, Jente Althuis, Rabby Shakur, Anna Hallahan, Hana Salama, Mohamed Coulibaly, Factors Driving Weapons Holding in the North East of Nigeria, Findings Report 33 (UNIDIR, Geneva, 2023) <https://doi.org/10.37559/MEAC/23/11>
- ▶ Compiled by Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTED), UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) and UNIDIR (2022), Technical Guidelines to Facilitate the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 2370 (2017) and Related International Standards and Good Practices on Preventing Terrorists from Acquiring Weapons (Geneva, March 2022) <https://unidir.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Technical-guidelines-2370.pdf>
- ▶ Simon Yazgi and Erica Mumford, The Arms-Related Risk Analysis Toolkit: Practical guidance for integrating conventional arms-related risks into conflict analysis and prevention (UNIDIR, Geneva, 2021) <https://unidir.org/publication/the-arms-related-risk-analysis-toolkit-practical-guidance-for-integrating-conventional-arms-related-risks-into-conflict-analysis-and-prevention/>


Websites of the institutions co-organizing the seminar:

FDFA: www.fdfa.admin.ch






UNIDIR: www.unidir.org

UNREC: www.unrec.org



 Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA
State Secretariat STS-FDFA
Peace and Human Rights

-  @unidir
-  /unidir
-  /un_disarmresearch
-  /unidirgeneva
-  /unidir



Palais de Nations
1211 Geneva, Switzerland
© UNIDIR, 2024

WWW.UNIDIR.ORG