

# The New Agenda for Peace - Universality, Trust and Solidarity

## GENEVA CONSULTATIONS

***Ensuring the challenges of our time are addressed from a prevention perspective.***

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### ***SESSION OUTCOME NOTES: 'Strengthening prevention through the regulation of conventional weapons'***

*Friday 17<sup>th</sup> March - 11:00-12:30 - led by Small Arms Survey & Control Arms*

#### **Background**

Boutros Boutros-Ghali's 1992 [Agenda for Peace](#) raised concerns that 'conventional arms continue to be amassed' (para 12) and presented solutions such as 'the monitoring of regional arms agreements' (para 24) and 'a levy on arms sales that could be related to maintaining an Arms Register by the United Nations' (para 71). The document defines a complex international security environment characterized by 'arms proliferation', 'racism', 'ecological damage, disruption of family and community life, greater intrusion into the lives and rights of individuals' as well as the need to both leverage the benefits and mitigate the threats of advances in technology and communications (para 12).

The 'interconnectedness of threats' was also a theme in Kofi Anan's 2005 report, *In Larger Freedom*, which was based around 'Freedom from Want', 'Freedom from Fear' and 'Freedom to Live in Dignity' – the nexus between security, development and human rights. It stated, 'We must strive just as hard to eliminate the threat of small arms and light weapons as we do to eliminate the threat of weapons of mass destruction' (para 81). The report goes on to call for the full implementation of the Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (including by establishing what was to become the International Tracing Instrument) (para 120) and the Conventions on the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines and of Certain Conventional Weapons (para 121).

The [2015 Sustainable Development Goals and 2030 Agenda](#), launched during Ban Ki-moon's tenure, sought to address '[f]actors which give rise to violence, insecurity and injustice, such as inequality, corruption, poor governance and illicit financial and arms flows' (para 35). The novelty of this document was the introduction of a specific indicators, namely 16.1 to '[s]ignificantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere', and 16.4 to '[s]ignificantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime'. Indicator 16.A makes a specific reference to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime through strengthened national institutions. In terms of human rights, indicator 4.7 mentions leveraging education to develop knowledge and skills on 'human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity'. The crosscutting Goal 5 on gender equality including indicator 5.2 to end 'all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres'. Indicator 16.b mentions the promotion and enforcement of non-discriminatory laws and policies.

As for current Secretary General António Guterres, in his [Agenda for Disarmament](#) (2018), he noted that 'armed violence remains disturbingly prevalent in many parts of the world, and the world remains grossly over-armed' (p.33). He also noted that 'military industries have continued high levels of production and found new markets' - with military spending burdening societies (p. 33). In [Our Common Agenda](#) (2021), he highlights that large-scale conflict kills fewer people than other forms of violence (p. 60), but without explicitly mentioning conventional arms. This document also lays out the framework for the New Agenda for Peace's third commitment to 'Promote peace and prevent conflicts' by seeking to:

- Reduce strategic risks (nuclear weapons, cyberwarfare, autonomous weapons)
- Strengthen international foresight
- Reshape responses to all forms of violence

- Invest in prevention and peacebuilding, including the Peacebuilding Fund and the Peacebuilding Commission
- Support regional prevention
- Put women and girls at the centre of security policy.

Clearly many of the challenges identified since the 1990s remain today and translating commitments into results has proven to be easier said than done.

This session sought to respond to calls from the current Secretary General in the New Agenda for Peace outline for those working on arms control to provide their insights into how the UN efforts in conflict mediation and prevention can more effectively address violence holistically.

### **Key takeaways**

Conventional weapons are not referred to in the Key Proposals of “Our Common Agenda,” which focused instead on nuclear weapons, cyberwarfare and autonomous weapons. This is a serious oversight. Armed conflicts, armed groups, criminal gangs and perpetrators of domestic violence all use conventional weapons. The Asia-Pacific and Middle East regions have been consistently importing large numbers of conventional weapons as states seek to use conventional weapons as an insurance policy in an uncertain global security environment. Moreover, government calls to increase arms production by the private sector in response to emerging security threats will be difficult to reverse in the near future and may undermine efforts to promote conflict prevention efforts that do not rely on conventional weapons. Finally, a wide range of conventional weapons – including improvised landmines and explosive devices (IEDs), privately made firearms (such as craft firearms, ‘ghost’ guns and 3D printed weapons), and weaponised commercial drones – can now be produced outside of the formal arms sector, which causes additional challenges to the existing international arms control architecture.

### **What should the new agenda for peace do to address conventional weapons?**

The New Agenda for Peace (NAP) could refocus conventional arms instruments on their original purpose of preventing human suffering and harm to civilians. In its early years, the UN used language on general and complete disarmament. Such language no longer resonates in the current global context. Nevertheless, the NAP could seek to provide an updated narrative on how disarmament and the control of conventional weapons contribute to peace and security; and reinvigorate the call to challenge increased military spending that takes away available resources for full realisation of human rights and human security. Such messaging needs to provide a clear vision to international legal and policy frameworks on conventional arms and to be used throughout the UN.

International discussions on conventional weapons currently focus on the supply side. However, there needs to be a reinvigorated discussion and follow-up on the demand for conventional weapons by states, groups and individuals. This involves recognising the impact of global powers ramping up their production of conventional weapons in recent years, as well as how demand for weapons may increase when there is lack of foresight and long term engagement in conflict prevention efforts. In addition, demand for weapons can result from implementation gaps in other agendas related to:

- The rule of law
- Discrimination, inequality and the non-respect for human rights and economic, social and cultural rights
- Access to resources, climate change and the environment
- Sustainable development

While there are efforts to find synergies between conventional arms instruments and complementary agendas at the international level, this often does not translate into the holistic policies and implementation efforts on the ground at the regional, national and local levels. Resources for implementation are often directed to responding to conflict emergencies that are high on the international agenda, which causes coordination

challenges in these settings and at the same time making it difficult to undertake preventative measures in vulnerable neighbouring states and other regions affected by armed violence.

When addressing conventional weapons, the NAP needs to develop ways to engage non-state actors. This includes the private sector, which should be seen as both a potential partner, and as a spoiler to disarmament and the control of conventional weapons. In particular, those operating in and around the arms trade should fulfil their responsibilities to respect human rights, beyond compliance with government regulations (which is no replacement for undertaking Human Rights Due Diligence) - as [these exist independently of States' abilities](#) and/or willingness to fulfil their own human rights obligations. A central role needs to be given to civil society organisations, which despite their ongoing work on conventional weapons are increasingly being side-lined in the field of conventional weapons. States and businesses should also commit to ensuring remedy and accountability for victims/survivors of rights abuses and human rights violations facilitated by conventional weapons, including by allowing challenges to export licences, even where previously approved by government.

The NAP needs to place a greater focus on implementing existing instruments of international law, as well as global policy frameworks such as the SDGs and WPS. There is a lack of rigorous and systematic follow-up on the obligations that states have signed on to and this threatens to undermine the credibility of international law. Too many instruments have been left to languish and efforts to increase universalisation have stalled. The Convention on Anti-personnel Landmines is frequently cited as a success story under which millions of mines have been cleared and destroyed, but it also underlines the challenges of achieving the objectives of a disarmament treaty as universalization has all but stalled and some States Parties face serious albeit diverse difficulties in implementing obligations relating to clearance of contaminated areas.. The universalization and implementation of international law relating to conventional weapons must be long term, consistently funded and not only apply to those situations regarded as “political hotspots”.

The NAP can encourage the various conventional weapons instruments and treaties to refocus efforts on addressing the root causes that led to their creation - ensuring that addressing arms control and disarmament is embedded in addressing the grievance-based drivers of armed violence and the human rights impacts of that violence. Many discussions have become overly technical and politicised. Accountability is lacking as the UN rarely calls out non-compliance to these treaties or frameworks, or violations of legal obligations through the misuse of conventional weapons.

Given the lack of coherence and consensus on international efforts to disarmament and conventional weapons control (and that some instruments such as the Arms Trade Treaty operate outside the UN), there is no UN body with an overall perspective on efforts related to disarmament and conventional arms control. An equivalent of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights for this field, with a mandate to assess states compliance with their obligations and commitments as well as to highlight linkages between conventional weapons and other agendas could go some way to remedying this.

***These inputs are representative of the following stakeholders present: QUNO, Small Arms Survey, Control Arms, UNIDIR, OHCHR, DRC, Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, Saferworld, PAX, WILPF, ICRC, International Campaign to Ban Landmines, Interpeace, University for Peace, UNITAR, Graduate Institute - CCFP (to be completed before finalizing)***

**Guiding Questions for the Consultation on ‘Strengthening prevention through the regulation of conventional weapons’ – 17th March**

Building on the aforementioned developments, and the opportunities the New Agenda for Peace as part of the implementation of Our Common Agenda - the consultation session on the 17<sup>th</sup> March on ‘Strengthening prevention through the regulation of conventional weapons’ hopes to focus on the following (non-exhaustive) guiding questions:

- What have been the most prominent implementation gaps when it comes to past instruments and how should the New Agenda for Peace seek to address them?
- How should the New Agenda for Peace address conventional arms in its prevention efforts?
- How can we better leverage cooperation within the conventional arms community in Geneva to achieve our shared objectives?

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