



# THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FIRST COMMITTEE: DISARMAMENT AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

**Purview of the Simulation:** The General Assembly First Committee addresses the disarmament of conventional weapons, weapons of mass destruction and related international security questions. The First Committee makes recommendations on the regulations of these weapons as they relate to international peace and security. The First Committee does not address legal issues

surrounding weapons possession or control complex peace and security issues addressed by the Security Council. For more information concerning the purview of the UN's General Assembly as a whole, see page 17.

**Website:** <http://www.un.org/ga/first/index.shtml>

## THE ILLICIT TRADE IN SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS IN ALL ITS ASPECTS

The illicit trade of small arms and light weapons (SALW) fuels civil wars, increases urban crime rates and arms the world's terrorists. Today, there are approximately 600 million SALW in circulation, with an additional eight million new weapons entering the market each year. These weapons are estimated to contribute to 500,000 deaths each year, including 300,000 that result from armed conflict. Easy and increased access to small arms and light weapons provides sufficient power to destabilize entire regions, as well as increase the longevity of conflicts. The illicit trade of small arms has ramifications beyond violent conflict and crime. SALW also increase the perception of insecurity, which interferes with the daily routines of many people. The perception of insecurity disrupts access to basic needs and health care, while hampering humanitarian relief efforts and displacing populations. Illicit trade of SALW also represents a major risk to humanitarian and development priorities.

Small arms control and reduction measures have typically been more comprehensive and extensive at the regional level. While there are a number of efforts at the regional level to control the trade of SALW, the UN is the primary actor at the international level. Some countries have argued that regionalized efforts should trump a coordinated international effort. Currently, two approaches have been taken to address the issue of SALW proliferation. The "supply-side" method concentrates on increasing accountability and government regulation of SALW in their production, transfer, and sale. Because most countries affected by small arms violence are not producers, emphasis has been placed on the supply end of trade in small arms. The second method concentrates on the "demand-side" that recognizes that in some countries, amounts of small arms that are already available through illegal channels will not be affected by supply-side strategies. This method looks to curb the use of weapons already out on the market by using peacekeeping operations to improve security within Member States, while developing disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs to reduce the amount of the small arms and light weapons that are already available.

The supplies of SALW tend to come from unsecured government stockpiles. Therefore, stockpile management and security are also an important control in combating the illicit trade of SALW. Unlike weapons of mass destruction, SALW have legitimate military, law enforcement, sporting, and recreational uses, which makes controlling their transfer more difficult. Improving international transfer controls is also a vital step toward curbing the illicit trade of SALW. Finally, marking, record keeping, and tracing are often identified as effective measures to preventing SALW from being diverted to those who would use them for illicit purposes.

In response to this growing problem, in July 2001 the UN convened the Conference on Illicit Trade of Small Arms and Light Weapons in All of its Aspects. The conference resulted in the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects (PoA). The PoA calls on Member States to make the production and possession of SALW a criminal offense, identify and destroy stockpiles, keep track of officially-held guns, issue end-user certificates for exports/transit, and notify the original supplier nation of re-export. States are also encouraged to support regional agreements, increase information exchange, and work to ensure better enforcement of arms embargoes.

The first review of the PoA occurred during the summer of 2006 at the UN Small Arms Review Conference, but the conference was unable to reach consensus on a clear framework for Member States to enact the protocols called for in the PoA. In July 2008, the Biennial Meeting of States convened to address the illicit trade of SALW in three specific areas: increased international cooperation and capacity building assistance, stockpile management and surplus disposal, and the current status of the illicit trade of SALW. The meeting established standards for managing stockpiles and destroying surplus weapons, and also reviewed progress made on the implementation of the International Tracing Instrument (ITI). Adopted by the General Assembly in 2006, the ITI calls for Member States to mark existing stocks of SALW held by government security forces, in order to reduce the likelihood of illicit transit to war zones.

In its efforts to combat the illicit trade in SALW, the General Assembly's work has focused primarily on the implementation of the Programme of Action. Major obstacles to its implementation include Member States who refuse to support the PoA or assist in curbing the use of SALW. The 2008 report from the Third Biennial Meeting on Small Arms proposes certain steps to be taken to resolve these issues. Actions under consideration are the continued inclusion of SALW in embargoes imposed during times of conflict and the inclusion of DDR programs in peace settlements and peacekeeping operations.

Future efforts will likely focus on the creation of a legally binding instrument that will create standards for export, import, and re-export of SALW. Also, additional efforts are needed to reach consensus on an internationally agreed-upon definition of what constitutes SALW. Successful consensus-building amongst Member States will be the first step towards addressing the pervasive violence and destabilization caused by SALW.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include:

- How does the illicit trade in SALW impose costs in humanitarian, development, and economic terms?
- What is the best way to create import and export controls while protecting the rights of end-users and not overburdening the legitimate transfer of SALW?

• How can the General Assembly best support the efforts of other UN bodies that address SALW, and how can coordination be further improved?

## Bibliography:

- “Ban Ki-Moon urges ‘incremental’ progress in deadlocked disarmament arena,” *UN News Centre*, 7 April 2008, [www.un.org/news](http://www.un.org/news).
- “Ban applauds progress on control of small arms trade but sees challenges ahead,” *UN News Centre*, 14 July 2008, [www.un.org/news](http://www.un.org/news).
- “The Illicit Arms Trade - Issue Brief No. 3” Federation of American Scientists, [www.fas.org](http://www.fas.org).
- Leff, Jonah, “Small Arms Agenda at U.N. Biennial Meeting of States,” Center for Defense Information, [www.cdi.org](http://www.cdi.org).
- “More action needed to curb illegal small arms trade, head of UN conferences says,” *UN News Centre*, 21 June 2006, [www.un.org/news](http://www.un.org/news).
- “Preventing armed conflicts requires broad based effort says UN official,” *UN News Centre*, 6 September 2006, [www.un.org/news](http://www.un.org/news).
- “Proliferation of illicit small arms leads to culture of violence and impunity,” *UN News Centre*, 26 June 2006, [www.un.org/news](http://www.un.org/news).
- “Secretary-General ‘disappointed’ by lack of agreement at conference on illicit arms trade,” *UN News Centre*, 10 July 2006, [www.un.org/news](http://www.un.org/news).
- “Small arms thwart stability and development, security council told,” *UN News Centre*, 30 April 2008, [www.un.org/news](http://www.un.org/news).
- “Threat posed to international peace by uncontrolled trade in small arms cannot be overemphasized, Security Council told as it holds day-long debate on issue,” *UN News Centre*, 30 April 2008, [www.un.org/news](http://www.un.org/news).
- “UN Arms Talks Meltdown: Conference Allows Global Gun Crisis to Continue,” International Action Network on Small Arms, July 2006, [www.iansa.org/un](http://www.iansa.org/un).
- “The United Nations Disarmament Yearbook 2008.” United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs, [www.un.org](http://www.un.org).
- “UN group on illicit arms offers recommendations on national laws,” *UN News Centre*, 12 June 2007, [www.un.org/news](http://www.un.org/news).

## UN Documents:

A/RES/63/72  
A/RES/62/22  
A/RES/61/89  
A/RES/61/71  
A/RES/61/66  
A/RES/50/70  
A/60/519  
A/60/88  
A/60/68  
A/58/207  
A/CONF.192/BMS/2008/3  
S/PRST/2004/1

Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspects

## Additional Web Resources:

[www.un.org/disarmament](http://www.un.org/disarmament) - United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs  
[www.poa-iss.org](http://www.poa-iss.org) - United Nations Program of Action, Implementation Support System  
[www.smallarmssurvey.org](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org) – Small Arms Survey  
[www.iansa.org](http://www.iansa.org) - International Action Network on Small Arms  
[www.genevadeclaration.org](http://www.genevadeclaration.org) - Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development

## PREVENTING THE ACQUISITION BY TERRORISTS OF RADIOACTIVE MATERIALS AND SOURCES

In the past decade, preventing the acquisition by terrorists of radioactive materials and sources has been of increasing concern for the UN. Until recently, radioactive materials were most frequently discussed in the context of overshadowing nuclear issues. While a rogue nuclear weapon represents the pinnacle of terrorism fears, terrorists can utilize radioactive sources to create weapons to achieve results that even conventional, biological, or chemical weapons cannot. Though radioactive materials are not capable of creating a nuclear explosion, radiological weapons may be fashioned in the form of a radiological dispersal device (RDD) or a radiation emission device. Owing to the relative accessibility of materials and attention an attack would bring, these devices are widely speculated to be a more likely weapon than a conventional nuclear weapon in possible terror scenarios.

In spite of their association with nuclear material and devices, radioactive materials and sources are not regarded as weapons of mass destruction on the basis that a radiological weapon would not inflict massive casualties. Rather, the damage caused would stem from extensive environmental cleanup, disruption of society, great economic costs, and public fear. Thus, radiological weapons are more often referred to as weapons of mass disruption. This term refers to the fact that radioactive weapons such as “dirty bombs,” which are a specific type of RDD that makes use of conventional explosives to disperse radioactive materials, are more likely to incite panic and disrupt society than inflict casualties on a large scale.

In 1957, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was created in response to the fears and intimidation from nuclear energy. The IAEA takes on the role of acting as the world’s nuclear authority and watchdog organization. The international community’s concerns were heightened as more states began to acquire and master nuclear technology. Combined with alarm over the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, these concerns resulted in the creation of the more comprehensive, legally-binding Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). States party to the treaty are obligated to forgo the utilization of nuclear technology for the creation of weapons, excluding the five Member States that were already declared nuclear weapon states. While the NPT achieved near-universal acceptance, its promulgation was unable to stem the advancement of nuclear technology. As nuclear technology proliferated among states, concerns spread regarding the safeguarding of nuclear material, precipitating the enactment of the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material (CPPNM) on 8 February 1987.

In more recent years, the focal point of concern has shifted from the usage of nuclear weapons by Member States to the threat that terrorists might acquire unsecured or orphaned radioactive materials and sources. In 2003, the IAEA approved revisions to the Code of Conduct on the Safety and Security of Radioactive Sources (Code of Conduct) which called for every Member State to adhere to prescribed measures of securing and monitoring radioactive sources. While the Code of Conduct is not a legally binding document, as of February 2009, 94 countries had expressed their support for it. Also in 2003, the IAEA organized the International Conference on the Security of Radioactive Sources to highlight radiological security and response measures, address orphaned radiological sources, and stress the importance of the Code of Conduct.

A follow-up conference to the International Conference took place in 2005 to discuss the creation of regulatory controls, how to combat the illicit trafficking of radioactive materials and emergency response measures to a RDD attack. The Group of Eight (G8) has also commit-

ted to prioritizing pressing provisions of the Code of Conduct including national regulations, disposal options, penalties for theft or misuse, and recovery of orphaned sources. The 2006 annual G8 summit announced the creation of the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, aimed at improving radioactive and nuclear material security and to prevent illicit-trafficking. As of July 2009, 75 nations have become partners in the Initiative.

The international community has recognized that the prevention of acquisition of radiological materials and sources by terrorists is of paramount importance to international peace and security. In April 2004, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1540, Non-proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, which called upon Member States to pursue multilateral compliance with non-proliferation and prevention of illicit-trafficking of materials and sources. On 8 July 2005, Amendments to the 1979 Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material were also adopted. The Amendments strengthen requirements in the Convention for domestic protection of nuclear material while also extending protection to include nuclear facilities and nuclear material in domestic use, storage and transport.

The International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism, entered into force by the General Assembly in July 2007, bolsters the objectives of past treaties by requiring Member States to create, define, and enforce criminal laws, establish jurisdiction, and increase cooperation in efforts to safeguard radioactive material. Also in 2007, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 62/46, calling for increased international cooperation, strengthening national measures and capacities, and ratifying past items concerning this issue. Member States were urged to adhere to the guidance set forth in the IAEA's Code of Conduct, especially with regard to guidelines addressing import and export of radioactive sources. The Assembly welcomed and encouraged efforts by Member States to locate and secure orphaned radioactive sources.

The success of these efforts will depend on each Member States' dedication and ability to implement national measures to combat illicit trafficking, monitor sources, recover orphaned sources, and aid other nations in equal endeavors. While the United Nations has made significant progress in the past decade towards recognizing and addressing the uniqueness of radioactive concerns, greater collaborative efforts are needed to achieve unified policies.

The General Assembly's role in the discussion of nuclear issues is contextualized within the comprehensive UN framework. As a coordinating body that works in concert with the Security Council and IAEA on this topic, the General Assembly's function is to discuss, debate, and issue recommendations. It can also request the IAEA or Security Council, as appropriate, to consider specific questions. The IAEA, as an independent international organization related to the UN system, reports annually to the General Assembly and to the Security Council, as needed. The Security Council remains the appropriate forum for the international community to reach binding decisions regarding nuclear proliferation. Bearing these roles in mind, the First Committee should discuss ways in which the GA can best encourage greater cooperative efforts between both relevant UN bodies and Member States.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include:

- What efforts to prevent terrorists from acquiring radioactive materials or sources have been successful?
- Are existing recommendations and measures readily applicable by all states? How might states aid each other in preventing terrorists from acquiring radioactive materials?
- What further measures could encourage greater coordination of efforts to secure stockpiles of radiological sources?

- What measures can the General Assembly take to best support the efforts of other UN bodies that address this topic? How can coordination and cooperation be improved?

## Bibliography:

- Acton, James M., M. Brooke Rogers, and Peter D. Zimmerman, "Beyond the Dirty Bomb: Re-thinking Radiological Terror," *Survival*, 2007, v 49, n 3.
- Bender, Bryan, "The long, hard road to nuclear safety," *Boston Globe*, 5 July 2009.
- Colella, Mike, et al. "An Introduction to Radiological Terrorism," *The Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, May 2005, v 20, n 2.
- "Concluding Work, Disarmament Committee Would Have General Assembly Urge States to Secure Nuclear Plants to Prevent Terrorists' Use of Radioactive Materials," *UN News Centre*, 2 November 2007, [www.un.org/news](http://www.un.org/news).
- Dodd, Brian, and Eric Reber. "Initiatives by the International Atomic Energy Agency to Prevent Radiological Terrorism," Sessions on Radiological Terrorism 2002: American Nuclear Society Winter Meeting, 18-20 November 2002, [eed.llnl.gov](http://eed.llnl.gov).
- Fischer, David, "History of the IAEA: The First Forty Years (adapted online excerpt)," 1997, [www.iaea.org](http://www.iaea.org).
- "Illicit trafficking, theft of nuclear materials 'a persistent problem,' UN agency reports," *UN News Centre*, 12 September 2007. [www.un.org/news](http://www.un.org/news).
- Krol, Joseph. "The Threat from Nuclear Terrorism" National Nuclear Security Administration, 30 May 2008, <http://nnsa.energy.gov>.
- "Revival of Commitment to Collective Security, Based on Equity Balance, Restraint, Cooperation Among States, Called for in First Committee as Debate Continues," *UN News Centre*, 15 October 2007, [www.un.org/news](http://www.un.org/news).
- "Seizures of radioactive materials fuel 'dirty bomb' fears," *The Times*, 6 October 2006.

## UN Documents:

- A/RES/63/60  
A/RES/62/46  
A/RES/61/8  
A/RES/60/73  
A/RES/59/290  
A/RES/58/241  
A/RES/56/24  
A/C.1/62/L.46  
A/C.1/60/L.39/REV1  
GA/DIS/3358  
S/RES/1540  
S/RES/1217  
S/PRST/2004/1  
Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons  
International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism  
Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material

## Additional Web Resources:

- [www.iaea.org](http://www.iaea.org) - International Atomic Energy Agency  
[www.nti.org/h\\_learnmore/radtutorial/index.html](http://www.nti.org/h_learnmore/radtutorial/index.html) - Radiological Terrorism Tutorial