

Statement in the name of Belgium, Luxembourg and The Netherlands for the Preparatory Committee for the Fourth United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in SALW in All Its Aspects

New York, 12-16 February 2024

Madam Chair,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the countries of the Belgium, Luxembourg and The Netherlands.

At the outset, the Benelux countries wish to congratulate you as you assume the important responsibility of Chair of this meeting. We thank you as well as your team for the excellent preparatory work.

Belgium, Luxembourg and The Netherlands would like to make the following statement on the section "Thematic debate on progress made in the implementation of the PoA at the national, regional and global levels".

National level

The primary responsibility for the implementation of the PoA and the ITI lies with national authorities. The Benelux countries encourage the PoA participating States to determine their priorities at the national level as outlined in the UN Secretary General report dedicated to SALW in 2019. Only by having comprehensive national strategies, compiled in cooperation between different national authorities, can effective actions be undertaken that address countries' own objectives in the implementation of the PoA depending on their own security context. This allows for a better matching between national security needs and the provisions of the PoA. In our view, this leads to a greater national ownership and responsibility for tackling SALW related challenges, as well as for progress in the implementation of the PoA.

Regional level

Acting at the regional level has shown to be a relevant way to facilitate the implementation of the PoA and the ITI. Indeed, regional organisations gather States that share certain common political objectives and that already cooperate in other fields like trade, customs, economic or security issues. The fight against illicit trafficking of SALW can therefore be embedded in other policies, such as cooperative border management, police and customs cooperation or antiterrorism cooperation.

Since international arms trafficking mostly happens at regional (and less on a global) level, action on the regional level is necessary to tackle arms trafficking. Regional organisations can also provide a platform for the exchange of information on SALW diversion methods whether through police, customs or intelligence cooperation. Regional conventions like the ECOWAS Convention on SALW provide best practices in this regard. Another mechanism is the Western Balkans Roadmap which is effective in bringing together groups of States that face similar challenges and therefore choose to coordinate their actions to provide a more efficient response. The cooperation on a technical level on SALW Control has proven itself as an accessible way to create Government-to-Government exchanges with enhanced mutual understanding as a result.

Global level

At the international level, synergies are to be found between the PoA and other instruments such as the Arms Trade Treaty and the Firearms Protocol. The ATT contains provisions covering the fight against diversion (particularly its article 11 as well as the recently established Diversion Information Exchange Forum). Even States that did not sign or ratify the ATT can use it as an example of how to put in place a national control system that includes the issue of diversion in the examination of whether a licence should be granted. The ATT also provides a legal basis for the exchange of information on methods, actors and routes of arms diversion, including SALW. This exchange of information is very important in order to improve our measures against the diversion of SALW.

The UN (or regional) peace-keeping operations can also play a role in helping states to implement the provisions of the PoA (notably the collection, record-keeping, tracing and destruction of illicit SALW and their ammunition). The collaboration between UN peace-keeping operations and UN Panels of Experts inside “embargo cells” can prove very fruitful.

I would like assure you Madam Chair of the full support of the Benelux delegations in your endeavors for the months to come.

Thank you.