

EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium

Promoting the European network of independent non-proliferation and disarmament think tanks

E-newsletter of the European Network of Independent Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Think Tanks

THE UN PROGRAMME OF ACTION TO PREVENT, COMBAT AND ERADICATE THE ILLICIT TRADE IN SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS (POA) PREPCOM - AN ASSESSMENT BY CALLUM WATSON



Callum Watson is gender coordinator at the Small Arms Survey, a think tank that aims to strengthen the capacity of governments and practitioners to reduce illicit arms flows and armed violence through research and training activities. He manages both gender-specific projects that explore linkages between arms control and the Women, Peace and Security agenda, as well as supporting gender mainstreaming in the Survey's work more broadly. Before joining the Survey, Callum worked for the Gender and Security Division at DCAF—the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance. His work encompassed teaching gender in the military, addressing gender bias in the justice sector, researching men and masculinities, and exploring barriers to women's meaningful participation in UN peacekeeping operations. Prior to that, he worked for the Fukuyama Board of Education in Japan. Callum holds a BSc in International Relations from the London School of Economics and Political Science and a Master in International Affairs from the Graduate Institute for International and Development Studies, Geneva.

The UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (PoA) is a globally agreed framework for activities to counter the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and control the negative consequences of Small Arms and Light Weapons. What is your assessment of the Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) for the fourth UN Review Conference of the PoA that took place between February 12 and 16 2024?

The PrepCom for RevCon4, held successfully, outlined a promising roadmap. Ambassador Maritza Chan Valverde of Costa Rica was appointed as the President, and the bureau and program of work were adopted smoothly. This seemingly trivial achievement contrasts with the hurdles faced by other mechanisms like the Conference on Disarmament.

Member states were constructive, expressing enthusiasm for proposals such as the Open-ended Technical Expert Group on new technologies and innovation. This Group would bring much-needed expertise for discussions on technical topics like polymer weapons and 3D printing.

Key areas of interest emerged, including enhancing international cooperation and reframing discussions on small arms diversion across their lifecycle. The approach mirrors the new Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management, indicating coherence in implementation with the POA, another theme likely to be discussed at RevCon4.

While Member States are still formulating their position, the PrepCom effectively allocated roles and set the initial program for RevCon4, achieving its primary goals modestly.

The Fourth Review Conference will take place between June 17 and 28. Based on your above assessment, what are the chances of a successful RevCon?

The real work begins now. The President already circulated a draft elements paper before the PrepCom, and plans to share a revised version by the end of March, leading to the first zero draft of the outcome document in April. Several bureau members plan to draft working papers supporting discussions on various topics. This gives member states ample time to prepare for discussions at RevCon4 starting in June.

Member states had frank constructive discussions at the first regional preparatory meeting in Kathmandu in January. Similar meetings are scheduled in West and Central Africa (Lomé), East and Southern Africa (Nairobi), Latin America (virtual) and the Caribbean (virtual) through March.

However, member states are disappointed as the planned UN fellowship training programme on small arms and light weapons control is currently on hold due to the current UN liquidity crisis.

What is your overall assessment of the implementation of the Programme since its inception in 2001, and what has been its main milestone, as well as what future actions or measures should be taken for its successful implementation?

The POA remains the sole universal framework dedicated to combating illicit small arms and light weapons, despite not yet achieving a sustained decline in firearm-related deaths.

Its main milestone has been the establishment of regional frameworks to coordinate implementation across national borders. Regional roadmaps exist for the Western Balkans and the Caribbean, with one in progress for Central America. The European Union has a joint small arms strategy, while ECCAS, ECOWAS, RECSA, and SADC have dedicated regional instruments on small arms. Regional collaboration is crucial facilitating regional responses to transnational issues, resource pooling, and exchanges of good practices.

Implementation poses a significant challenge for the POA, with member states expressing needs to combat and eradicate illicit arms trade. However, resource constraints, exacerbated by the UN liquidity crisis, and weak support mechanisms hinder efforts.

Finally, for the POA to realise its full potential, it would need to complement existing efforts to prevent the supply of illicit arms by also addressing those factors that have resulted in demand for illicit small arms being consistently strong since the inception of the programme.

Despite its imperfections, the POA provides a vital platform for international discussion and fosters cooperation to address the issue of illicit small arms and light weapons effectively.

PROLIFERATION CHALLENGES OF FUSION TECHNOLOGY

Research into fusion energy has mainly followed two approaches: inertial confinement fusion (ICF) and magnetic confinement fusion (MCF). While ICF has recognised applications in weapons physics and allows the study of nuclear weapon physics without actual testing, MCF is generally seen as safer from a non-proliferation standpoint.

Discussions on proliferation risks associated with MCF focus on two key concerns: managing tritium inventories and the potential for generating fissile material. Tritium, an essential component in advanced nuclear weapons and a fuel in fusion reactors, along with the high neutron flow in these reactors, theoretically allows for plutonium generation – although the general consensus is that using fusion reactors to produce fissile material for military purposes is unlikely. While we focus on tritium and the generation of fissile material, there are other proliferation risks from technologies related to MCF, such as superconducting magnets, lithium blankets and materials facing the plasma.

Renewed interest in magnet technology, especially in MCF reactors where magnetic fields are crucial, opens the possibility of reconsidering calutron technology. Modern magnets can outperform the calutrons used previously, potentially making calutron-based isotope separation viable again.

Lithium blankets are essential for tritium generation, a key process to maintain the fusion reaction. This technology is similar to that used in thermonuclear weapons. Improving lithium blankets in fusion could translate into more effective designs for nuclear weapons.

Materials facing the plasma in MCF reactors experience extreme conditions, comparable to those in re-entry vehicles. Both cases require materials that can withstand high temperatures, mechanical stress and erosion. Fusion technology has a dual-use potential, highlighting the need for careful oversight to balance the pursuit of innovative energy solutions with the prevention of nuclear weapon proliferation.

Enrique Miralles-Dolz, Institute for Risk and Uncertainty, University of Liverpool

Latest Publications

Preventive Arms Control for Small Armed Aircraft and Missiles. Jürgen Altmann, Mathias Pilch, Dieter Suter, Forschung DSF No. 66, Osnabrück: Deutsche Stiftung Friedensforschung, 2023

Russia's approach to arms control: caught between asymmetry and the desire for strategic stability. Markéta Svobodová. European Security Volume 33 - Issue 1, 2023

Reviving the Florence disarmament agreement. Carlo Trezza. NATO Defence College Foundation, December 2023

Germany and Nuclear Weapons in the 21st Century. Atomic Zeitenwende? Ulrich Kühn. Routledge. March 2024

Network Calls

The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) seeks to appoint a Research Associate to work for the China Programme located in London. This position will contribute to IISS original research on Chinese (traditional and non-traditional) security and defence issues. The position will also assist the IISS Senior Fellow and China Programme Head with organisational and implementation duties regarding ongoing and future project work.

More info: [Here](#)

The Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF) is seeking a researcher for the Research Group on Chemical and Biological Weapons Control.

More info: [Here](#)

EU NEWS

STATEMENT BY THE HIGH REPRESENTATIVE ON THE LATEST REPORT ON THE USE OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS IN SYRIA

ON 25 FEBRUARY 2024 THE EU HIGH REPRESENTATIVE, JOSEP BORRELL, ISSUED AN STATEMENT IN WHICH ACKNOWLEDGED THE FEBRUARY 22ND ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS (OPCW) REPORT THAT FOUND THE ISLAMIC STATE IN IRAQ AND THE LEVANT (ISIL)/DA'ESH RESPONSIBLE FOR A CHEMICAL WEAPONS ATTACK ON 1 SEPTEMBER 2015 IN THE MAREA TOWN IN NORTHWEST SYRIA.

ACCORDING TO THE HIGH REPRESENTATIVE, THE REPORT CONCLUDES THAT THERE ARE REASONABLE GROUNDS TO BELIEVE THAT ISIL/DA'ESH UNITS FIRED ARTILLERY MUNITIONS CONTAINING SULPHUR MUSTARD AT VARIOUS LOCATIONS, AFFECTING AT LEAST 11 PERSONS. SOMETHING THAT HE STRONGLY CONDEMNED.

HE ADDED THAT THE USE OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS BY ANYONE – BE IT A STATE OR A NON-STATE ACTOR – ANYWHERE, AT ANY TIME AND UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES IS A VIOLATION OF INTERNATIONAL LAW AND CAN AMOUNT TO THE MOST SERIOUS OF INTERNATIONAL CRIMES - WAR CRIMES AND CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY.

HE STATED THAT IMPUNITY FOR THESE HORRIBLE ACTS MUST NOT BE TOLERATED. AND THAT IT IS NOW UP TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO TAKE APPROPRIATE ACTION.

IN LIGHT OF THIS NEW REPORT, THE EUROPEAN UNION WILL CONSIDER INTRODUCING FURTHER MEASURES AS APPROPRIATE, AS THE EU IS COMMITTED TO ENSURING FULL ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THOSE RESPONSIBLE.

MORE INFO: [HERE](#)

NETWORK NEWS

NEW ONLINE PLATFORM GUNVIOLENCE.EU

A NEW ONLINE PLATFORM -GUNVIOLENCE.EU – IS FREELY AVAILABLE TO POLICYMAKERS, POLICE OFFICERS, STRATEGIC ANALYSTS, RESEARCHERS, JOURNALISTS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC SINCE 7 DECEMBER 2023.

CENTRAL TO THIS PLATFORM IS AN ONLINE INCIDENT MONITOR THAT COLLECTS UP-TO-DATE INFORMATION ON FIREARMS INCIDENTS IN THE 27 EU MEMBER STATES. POWERED BY ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TECHNOLOGY, THE MONITOR CONTINUOUSLY SCANS MORE THAN 360 LOCAL NEWS SOURCES TO IDENTIFY AND ANALYSE RELEVANT FIREARMS INCIDENTS. IT CAN NOW PROVIDE A CONTINUOUSLY UPDATED PICTURE OF FIREARMS INCIDENTS IN EVERY EU COUNTRY AT ANY TIME AND GENERATE REGULAR TREND REPORTS.

EIGHT NEW REPORTS WERE ALSO PUBLISHED. THEY EXAMINE THE LATEST EUROPEAN TRENDS IN LETHAL AND NON-LETHAL FIREARM VIOLENCE, CRIMINAL FIREARM VIOLENCE, FAMILY FIREARM VIOLENCE, GENDER-BASED FIREARM VIOLENCE, TYPES OF FIREARMS USED IN VIOLENCE, AND THE TRAFFIC IN PRIVATELY-MADE FIREARMS AND AMMUNITION. GUNVIOLENCE.EU ALSO CONTAINS UNIQUE KEY DATA SHEETS FOR EACH MEMBER STATE, MAKING FIREARM-RELATED ISSUES MORE TANGIBLE. A THEMATIC OVERVIEW OF EUROPEAN FIREARMS RESEARCH AND LINKS TO OFFICIAL DATA SOURCES ARE ALSO AVAILABLE.

GUNVIOLENCE.EU IS THE END RESULT OF PROJECT INSIGHT, A PROJECT IMPLEMENTED BY FIVE RESEARCH INSTITUTES – FLEMISH PEACE INSTITUTE (COORDINATOR), THE SMALL ARMS SURVEY, TEXTGAIN, STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE (SIPRI), AND LEIDEN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE OF SECURITY AND GLOBAL AFFAIRS – WITH SUPPORT FROM EUROPOL, EUROPEAN FIREARMS EXPERTS, THE BELGIAN FEDERAL POLICE, THE DUTCH POLICE AND THE SOUTH EASTERN AND EASTERN EUROPE CLEARINGHOUSE FOR THE CONTROL OF SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS (SEESAC). THE PROJECT IS FUNDED BY THE EU INTERNAL SECURITY FUND – POLICE.

MORE INFO: [HERE](#)

STUDY ON THE RISK OF NUCLEAR CATASTROPHE

THE OPEN NUCLEAR NETWORK AND THE FORECASTING RESEARCH INSTITUTE ARE SEEKING PARTICIPANTS FOR A STUDY TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE RANGE OF EXPERT VIEWS ON THE RISK OF NUCLEAR CATASTROPHE IN THE COMING DECADES. THE STUDY CONSISTS OF A PAIR OF SURVEYS THAT SEEK TO QUANTITATIVELY AND QUALITATIVELY DOCUMENT THE VIEWS OF THE NUCLEAR POLICY COMMUNITY AND IDENTIFY THE KEY UNDERLYING DISAGREEMENTS IN TERMS THAT CAN BE DEFINITELY EVALUATED. IF YOU CHOOSE TO PARTICIPATE, THE SURVEYS WILL ASK YOU ABOUT YOUR VIEWS ON WHICH EVENTS ARE MOST LIKELY TO LEAD TO NUCLEAR WEAPONS USE

MORE INFO: [HERE](#)



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