



Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Biennial Meeting of States (BMS)?

The BMS is part of the follow-up process of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects (Programme of Action) – an international instrument adopted by a United Nations conference, in July 2001, that aims to help curb the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons (SALW). It is a gathering of delegates from the UN Member States and representatives from international, regional and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) held every two years to consider the implementation of the Programme of Action. During the BMS, each delegation may make a statement regarding national implementation of the Programme of Action. Delegates also discuss the implementation of the Programme of Action at the regional, sub-regional and global levels. NGOs are also given an opportunity to make statements.

2. What did the First BMS achieve?

The First BMS was held in New York in July 2003. Delegates from 145 countries, as well as representatives of 20 international and regional organizations and 172 NGOs, participated in the meeting. National reports submitted by Member States and the debates during the meeting showed that significant progress had been made in implementing the Programme of Action, but that much more needed to be done to stop the spread of illicit small arms and light weapons. The meeting resulted in a procedural report, to which a Chairperson's summary was annexed. The report can be found at: <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N03/436/04/PDF/N0343604.pdf>

3. What does the Second BMS hope to achieve?

The Second BMS aims to serve as a forum for States, international and regional organizations, and civil society to exchange information on the implementation of the Programme of Action. It will highlight successes and best practices related to efforts to curb the spread of illicit small arms and light weapons. The Second BMS will also identify areas that need greater attention.

4. What is the role of civil society in the BMS?

Civil society plays an important role in the debate on issues related to the spread of illicit small arms and light weapons. These groups conduct research on small arms issues; publish reports and other materials to raise awareness among policy makers, the media, and the public about various problems resulting from the misuse of small arms and light weapons; and engage in advocacy work related to small arms violence and their impact. NGOs representing the entire spectrum of the debate on small arms and light weapons have an equal opportunity to present their views. Such NGOs include policy oriented groups, gun control organizations, sports shooting organizations, research institutes, aid organizations, human rights groups and faith-based organizations.

5. What is the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects?

The Programme of Action is a politically-binding international instrument that addresses the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. It was unanimously adopted by UN Member States at the July 2001 UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects.

6. What are the aims of the Programme of Action?

The Programme of Action aims to develop or strengthen agreed norms and measures with a view to promoting concerted and coordinated international efforts to curbing the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. It also intends

to develop and implement agreed international measures to curb illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in those weapons, to mobilize political will throughout the international community and to encourage cooperation to such ends. In addition, the Programme of Action seeks to raise awareness about SALW issues and to promote responsible actions by States to help prevent the illicit manufacture, export, import, transfer and re-transfer of such weapons.

7. What types of commitments are embodied in the Programme of Action?

The Programme of Action contains a wide range of political undertakings and concrete actions that Member States have committed themselves to at the national, regional and global levels. They include, for example, developing, adopting and strengthening SALW national legislation, SALW transfer controls, destruction of weapons that are confiscated, seized, or collected, as well as fostering international cooperation and assistance with a view to strengthening the ability of States to identify and trace illicit arms and light weapons.

8. How is the implementation of the Programme of Action monitored?

The Programme of Action outlines several follow-up mechanisms to oversee its implementation and further development. These include the BMS and a review conference to be held from 26 June to 7 July 2006. In addition, Member States submit national reports on the implementation of the Programme of Action. These reports help the UN and Member States assess progress in the effort to combat illicit small arms and light weapons.

9. Does the Programme of Action aim to curb the legal trade in small arms and light weapons?

No. The Programme of Action outlines measures to help curb and eliminate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

10. Does the Programme of Action affect the rights of private citizens to bear arms?

No. It is the prerogative of each State to legislate on the rights of its citizens to bear arms.

11. How many small arms and light weapons are in circulation worldwide?

Experts estimate that there are over 600 million small arms and light weapons in circulation worldwide.

12. What impact do small arms and light weapons have on communities?

These arms were the weapons of choice in the vast majority of armed conflicts that took place in the past decade. It is estimated that small arms and light weapons are responsible for over half a million deaths per year, including 300,000 in armed conflict and 200,000 more from homicides and suicides. In addition, the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons may destabilize regions; spark, fuel and prolong conflicts; obstruct relief programmes by diminishing the security of aid workers; undermine peace initiatives; exacerbate human rights abuses and hamper development.

13. Are small arms and light weapons covered by an international instrument?

Small arms and light weapons are covered by two international instruments within the UN framework – the Programme of Action, which was adopted in July 2001, and the Protocol Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, a legally-binding instrument, which will enter into force on 3 July 2005. In addition, several regional and subregional agreements have been developed to help address SALW issues.

14. What practical steps is the UN taking to help curb the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons?

The UN conducts training workshops, conferences and other events to build local capacity to address SALW issues, including training law enforcement officials and assistance in the area of stockpile management and security. The UN also works with States to design, implement and monitor weapons collection and destruction programs. In addition, UN experts are dispatched, at the request of the interested State, to gather information and advise on ways to address national small arms problems and to assist with the establishment and functioning of

national commissions on small arms. The UN also supports negotiations, facilitates dialogue and undertakes studies on the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons.

15. What's next?

Following the Second BMS, the Programme of Action will be reviewed by Member States at a Review Conference to be held in New York from 26 June to 7 July 2005.

16. Where can I find more information on the BMS and the UN's role in preventing the illicit spread of small arms and light weapons?

For more information on the Second BMS and on the UN's role in preventing the spread of illicit small arms and light weapons, go to: <http://disarmament2.un.org/cab/salw.html>

Key events in the history of UN activity in the area of small arms and light weapons

- ◆ 1995: GA resolution raises issue of small arms and light weapons for the first time in a UN forum.
- ◆ 1997: Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms issues a report (A/52/298).
- ◆ 1999: Group of Governmental Experts on Small Arms issues a report (A/54/258).
- ◆ July 2001: Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects unanimously adopts the Programme of Action.
- ◆ 2002/2003: a Group of Governmental Experts on Tracing Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons discussed the feasibility of an instrument on marking and tracing.
- ◆ July 2003: First BMS held in New York.
- ◆ June 2005: States agree on an instrument to enable States to identify and trace, in a timely and reliable manner, illicit SALW.
- ◆ July 2005: Entry into Force of the Firearms Protocol.
- ◆ July 2005: Second BMS held in New York.

Weapons collection and destruction: a few examples from the field

- ◆ On 23 November 2002, over 13,135 SALW and 7,200 units of ammunition were destroyed in Argentina with the assistance of DDA's Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (UN-LiREC) and the UN Development Program (UNDP).
- ◆ On 2 December 2002, approximately 2,573 SALW were destroyed in a programme organized by the Government of Peru and UN-LiREC.
- ◆ In September 2003, the Government of the Republic of Paraguay destroyed an estimated 2,615 SALW and 80 tons of ammunition with the assistance of UNDP, the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) of the Organization of American States (OAS) and UN-LiREC.
- ◆ On 1 December 2004, Costa Rica destroyed approximately 2,096 SALW in an event organized by UNDP, CICAD/OAS and UN-LiREC.
- ◆ On 9 December 2004, 10,048 small arms and light weapons were destroyed in an event held by the Brazilian Army with the support of the local UNDP Office, CICAD/OAS, and UN-LiREC.
- ◆ As of 31 March 2005, over 46,000 guns had been collected in South Africa by the South African Police Service and Safety and Security Ministry since the start of amnesty declared on 1 January 2005.
- ◆ In April 2005, the Government of Rwanda destroyed 6,000 small arms and light weapons, many dating from the country's pre-1994 genocide administration.
- ◆ On 5 April 2005, the Nigerian National Committee on the Destruction of Illegal Arms and Ammunition destroyed 2,738 small arms and 5,368 explosives and units of ammunition in a single exercise. A total of 4,678 small arms and 8,256 units of ammunition have been destroyed since 15 November 2004.