

9. National coordination mechanisms: Lessons learned

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The spread and misuse of illicit small arms and light weapons is a problem that cannot be solved through the efforts of government departments, law enforcement agencies or civil society groups working on their own.

To improve the control of small arms at a national level it is important to ensure that there is co-operation and co-ordination between all those who are affected by the problem or who are responsible for tackling it. The PoA calls on Governments to establish, or designate national coordination bodies or commissions and institutional infrastructure responsible for policy guidance, research and monitoring of efforts to tackle small arms and light weapons problems in the implementation of the PoA.

Around 90 states - including my own - have implemented this commitment, through the creation of what are variously called National Commissions, Coordination Agencies or National Focal Points.

National Commissions should include a broad spectrum of members, including government ministries, law enforcement agencies, and civil society organizations. The involvement of some ministries is always important, including for example Defence, Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs and Justice as well as Police and Customs agencies. It is also important to involve civil society groups including NGOs and academics.

It is important to ensure that the National Commission is involved in all decision making on small arms control, and that they are resourced appropriately. In fact research suggests that there is often a link between high levels of donor engagement and the establishment of effective National Commissions.

I am a civil society member of the Sri Lanka National Commission against the Proliferation of Illicit Small Arms (NCAPISA). This Commission was established by Presidential decree in 2004 and aims to coordinate the development and implementation of programmes to tackle illicit small arms and light weapons in Sri Lanka. It comprises 12 members including two members of civil society - of which I am one.

Since it was established, the Commission has undertaken a number of high profile activities. Highlights to date include a major public event to mark International Arms Destruction Day in Colombo in July 2005 at which over 35,000 small arms were destroyed; the 'Ballot Without The Bullet' campaign during the Presidential elections of 2005; and commissioning a national small arms and light weapons survey.

Civil society participation in the National Commission has been really important in getting it off the ground. For example, the district-level consultation process aimed to connect local problems relating to community safety and security to national policy making involved discussions in every district. This brought together community organisations, women's groups and others to identify links between the spread and misuse of small arms and tackling community safety, security and development challenges.

Sri Lanka is not of course alone in coordinating its small arms and light weapons control efforts through a National Commission. There are some examples of similar work in other places, especially in parts of Africa, the Americas and South Eastern Europe. Although almost 90 states have created commissions, over a hundred have yet to do so and in many cases, even where they do exist they are often poorly resourced and contribute little to addressing small arms and light weapons problems. Experience suggests that National Commissions are a critical part of the arms control puzzle. As a Commission member, I would like to recommend that all states take action to establish and support a National Commission without delay.

IANSA believes that the outcome of this Review Conference should:

- Re-commit states to the establishment of national coordination bodies or commissions in all states. These bodies should be responsible for the development and implementation of national plans or strategies to address small arms and light weapons problems. They should have broad membership and ensure integration of arms control plans and initiatives into national security strategies and national poverty reduction frameworks.
- Commit those states and regional organisations that are in a position to do so to increase their technical and financial assistance in this area
- Encourage those states that have already begun to establish national coordinating bodies to ensure that they function effectively. This will involve providing high level political support as well as adequate financial and technical resources to ensure that small arms and light weapons problems are tackled in a comprehensive and integrated manner.
- Commit states to sharing information on the development and operations of national coordinating bodies and commissions with other states, relevant international and regional bodies and most importantly, the general public.

Thank you for your attention.