

NEW PUBLICATION

Developing a Mechanism to Prevent Illicit Brokering in Small Arms and Light Weapons—Scope and Implications

One of the consequences of the global arms trade is the increasing reliance on arms brokers. Brokering is often a necessary supportive activity to facilitate the supply of arms required for legitimate national defence, law enforcement and civilian uses. However, the absence in most countries of effective laws and regulations to govern arms brokering has created a significant grey area in the international arms trade that is open to substantial abuse. A growing number of reports indicate that strict state control of arms brokering—including of small arms, light weapons and related materiel—is an essential component in efforts to eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

During the past decade, the problems posed by unregulated arms brokering activities have become an issue of growing concern for governments, international organizations and civil society in the context of international efforts against the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. An important body of research has brought the role of arms brokers in facilitating arms transfers to unlawful or illegitimate recipients to the fore of the political agenda. Despite their central role in the arms business, the activities of arms brokers are often unregulated. Arms brokers who facilitate unlawful arms transfers are aiding and abetting violators of arms embargoes, armed groups, criminal gangs and terrorists, thus fuelling insecurity and conflict in many regions of the world.

A number of regional organizations such as the African Union, the Andean Community, the Economic Community of West African States, the European Union, the Organization of American States, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and the Southern African Development Community, as well as the states party to the Wassenaar Arrangement and the states of the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa, have developed instruments and standards for the regulation of brokering activities that the respective member states are encouraged or required to adopt. Such instruments could form the basis of a global effort to curb illicit arms brokering. Partly as an effect of these regional agreements, about 40 countries throughout the world have developed specific controls

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on brokering activities. In the majority of national legislations, however, brokering activities remain unregulated. In addition, loopholes and inconsistencies in existing systems of control continue to be exploited by unscrupulous brokers.

Following the Secretary-General's consultations with all Member States and interested regional and subregional organizations, and recognizing the need for concerted global action, in 2005 the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 60/81 establishing a group of governmental experts to consider further steps to enhance international cooperation in preventing, combating and eradicating illicit brokering in small arms and light weapons.

This study, conducted under the auspices of the United Nations Coordinating Action on Small Arms (CASA), examines existing instruments at the national and international levels. It aims to identify common elements and options for regulation, to enhance understanding of the issue and to clarify its most complex aspects.

Developing a Mechanism to Prevent Illicit Brokering in Small Arms and Light Weapons: Scope and Implications

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ACTIVITY

International Assistance for Implementing the Programme of Action on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons

In January 2006 UNIDIR launched a multi-phase research project on the international assistance offered to states for implementing the United Nations Programme of Action on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons (PoA).

The first phase of the project identified the types of assistance that states themselves have stated they would like to receive, and revealed certain challenges related to submitting and receiving assistance requests. This phase of research culminated in the publication of a global overview of international assistance allocated between 2001 and 2005. The report offers recommendations for both short- and long-term measures to improve coordination of assistance requests. Over 130 UN Member States and international organizations participated in the first phase of research and many more were reached through discussions and awareness-raising activities.

The second phase of the project is now under way. UNIDIR is conducting a series of case studies with a view to establishing a mechanism to facilitate the matching of resources with needs. The first set of case studies will take place in the East African countries of Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. In parallel to building a set of indicators to identify needs, UNIDIR is establishing a web-based database where National Focal Points in affected states will be able to post their self-identified assistance needs, and donors and implementing agencies will be able to pinpoint opportunities for cooperation in particular regions or thematic areas.

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