

Facilitator's Summary

Informal consultations on opportunities and challenges presented by recent developments in small arms and light weapons manufacturing, technology and design¹

25 June 2021

1. In line with the report of the Third United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects, the Chair-designate of the Seventh Biennial Meeting of States, Ambassador Martin Kimani (Kenya), convened virtual informal consultations on 25 June 2021 on the topic of “Opportunities and challenges presented by recent developments in small arms and light weapons manufacturing, technology and design” with a view to facilitating consensus on this issue prior to the Seventh Biennial Meeting of States.² The Chair-designate requested the delegation of Belgium to facilitate these informal consultations.
2. With a view to supporting States in their preparations for the informal consultations, an annex including a non-exhaustive list of documents relevant to discussions on recent developments in small arms and light weapons manufacturing, technology and design was circulated by the Chair-designate.³ The annex illustrated the range of materials available to States when considering this topic, including the Chairs’ summaries of the Open-ended Meetings of Governmental Experts from 2011 and 2015 that addressed new technologies, as well as related reports of the Secretary-General.⁴
3. Following opening remarks delivered by the Chair-designate that underscored the opportunity provided by these informal consultations to delve into some detail on the impact of recent technological developments of relevance to the Programme of Action and International Tracing Instrument, the floor was yielded to the Facilitator. The Facilitator, in her introductory intervention, assured delegations that the views of States on this topic would be properly fed into the broader preparations for the Seventh Biennial Meeting of States.
4. By way of introduction, and referring to the non-exhaustive list of documents mentioned in point 2 above, the Facilitator emphasized that the topic at hand was not entirely new as it has been under consistent discussion in the framework the Programme of Action and International Tracing Instrument since 2011. It was noted that potential challenges posed by recent technologies and developments in manufacture and design, including modular and polymer weapons, were first discussed at the technical level at the first Open-ended Meeting of Governmental Experts in 2011. The Facilitator also highlighted related discussions held at the Third Review Conference in 2018, recalling that States had committed to take into account the challenges arising from modular design and the use of polymers, notably the difficulties encountered in marking and tracing.

¹ This summary is drafted under the responsibility of the Facilitator of the informal consultations, Ms. Caroline Pailhe (Belgium), and does not necessarily reflect the views of Member States.

² [A/CONF.192/2018/RC/3](#), Section V, paragraph 3.

³ https://meetings.unoda.org/section/poa-bms7-2021_informal-consultations/

⁴ See [A/74/187](#); [A/CONF.192/BMS/2014/1](#)

5. A representative of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) was invited to offer a presentation that reflected on opportunities and challenges presented by recent developments in small arms and light weapons manufacture, design and technology as a means of providing States with further background. The UNIDIR representative focused on the difficulties presented by the use of polymer materials in weapon design given their vulnerability to erasure and obliteration as well as increased challenges for their interdiction when trafficked through parcels and postal shipments; marking challenges posed by modular weapons, which are constituted by multiple, detachable parts that could be changed and thus become more difficult to trace; and risks arising from additive manufacturing, in particular those items that are not subject to production or export controls. Other technological applications were also referenced, including the use of QR/data matrix bar codes, distributed ledger technologies to secure transfers and transportation, and radio frequency identification tags for stockpile management purposes. The UNIDIR representative concluded by offering a series of recommendations that States could consider in their deliberations on this topic, inter alia, establishment of a technical panel or group dedicated to informing on related technological developments; deepened dialogue with industry, particularly on marking, recordkeeping, tracing and storage techniques; further examination of technical methods to recover obliterated markings; and promotion of targeted capacity-building on weapons identification, interdiction, and tracing techniques.

6. Delegations were subsequently invited to exchange views, including in reaction to the presentation offered by the representative of UNIDIR. Several delegations welcomed the opportunity to engage specifically on the topic of recent technological developments, recalling previous discussions held in the framework of the Programme of Action and International Tracing Instrument. The importance of safeguarding the full effectiveness and applicability of both instruments was underscored. It was noted that several of the technologies addressed were not necessarily new but continued to evolve, thus requiring further consideration and adequate response. Two delegations enquired about the possible establishment, composition, and functioning of a technical panel or group dedicated to informing on related technological developments.

7. The opportunities offered by recent technological developments in manufacture and design were acknowledged with the fundamental importance of technology transfer, capacity-building and international cooperation and assistance emphasized. One delegation called for embedding related technology transfer into broader cooperation frameworks. The view was also expressed that effective tracing requires adequate international cooperation and assistance. In referring to the provision of international cooperation and assistance, one delegation emphasized that, in addition to training and capacity-building, transfer of technology and equipment was also necessary.

8. Views were exchanged on the challenges posed by modular and polymer weapons. Consistent with the provisions of the International Tracing Instrument, it was affirmed that a unique weapon marking on the essential or structural component is required regardless of materials or methods used. It was suggested that States continue to engage in a technical exchange to explore good practice. One delegation supported a step-by-step approach in advance of the Fourth Review Conference to determine if further action, including development of new definitions, guidance or documents, may be needed to address modular and/or polymer weapons. Several delegations called for further analysis on potential implications and further consultations among States,

including manufacturing and producer States. One delegation, in the context of noting challenges posed by polymer weapons, called for ensuring that both manufacture and post-manufacture marks were applied in line with relevant instruments.

9. Some views were expressed on additive manufacturing. One delegation stated that while 3-D printing was not likely to render relevant international frameworks obsolete, implementation of those frameworks may be more challenging.

10. Discussion was also held on information exchange, including in the framework of the national reports submitted biennially on implementation of the Programme of Action and International Tracing Instrument. One delegation noted the importance of understanding the level of urgency around addressing recent technological developments and identifying national good practice in this regard.

11. The Chair-designate expressed appreciation to the Facilitator for her efforts and for moderating the constructive exchange of views. He appreciated the robust and useful discussion among States, while looking forward to further discussions at the Seventh Biennial Meeting of States with a view to making progress in addressing the opportunities and challenges presented by recent developments in small arms and light weapons manufacturing, technology and design. The Chair-designate noted that the upcoming Seventh Biennial Meeting of States would be an opportunity to ensure the Programme of Action and International Tracing Instrument remain fit-for-purpose.