Statement to the OEWG on conventional ammunition first substantive session (May 25, 2022)

Emily Callsen – the International Action Network on Small Arms

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Mr. Chair, member states,

Thank you for the opportunity to address this assembly. My name is Emily Callsen, and I am the Communication Officer for the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA).

IANSA and its more than 500 network members have been advocating for a global commitment to address the problems arising from the ammunition life cycle for many years. We, therefore, welcome the continuing effort of States in pursuing this goal through this Open-ended Working Group on conventional ammunition after the solid basis laid by the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE). We also note that the efforts of the OEWG complement the work on ammunition through the UN Programme of Action and other instruments. The OEWG does not eliminate the need for that work.

During this first substantive session, IANSA would like to share some inputs collected from the experience of its global network members, who dedicate their work and life to mitigating the effects of small arms and ammunition proliferation.

As such, we invite this Working Group and member states to find in civil society strong and enthusiastic allies, not only technically qualified but also capable of increasing adherence to this process at the local, national, and regional levels.

Another critical aspect of this process is the opportunity for the full and effective participation of women, youth, and other underrepresented groups in the discussions about ammunition management – especially when addressing risk analysis, as well as safety and security guidelines. Experience shows that unexploded ordnance abandoned on battlefields and bullets used in criminal activities after being diverted to the illicit market or to illicit or unintended users unevenly impact different groups. IANSA urges for gender-sensitive outcomes at the end of this process and in future implementation.

Substantially, IANSA welcomes the announced scope set for the first substantive session of the Working Group to comprehensively address both safety and security challenges related to conventional ammunition. As a network composed of organisations working primarily to reduce armed violence, we would like to emphasise the security aspect of preventing ammunition diversion.
Arguably, one of the most challenging aspects of preventing ammunition diversion comes from the difficulty in tracing ammunition, especially as it relates to small arms ammunition. Hence, an essential contribution from this new global framework could be the establishment of minimal standard marking guidelines for conventional ammunition.

At the time of manufacture, the vast majority of ammunition is already marked for internal (safety, quality control, and record-keeping) and external motives (buyers’ requirements). Existing technologies such as stamping, dot peen or micropercussion, mechanical engraving, laser engraving, and even chemical taggants are currently used to mark certain types of ammunition. Developments and advances in technology could offer new opportunities for “digital marking”, such as radio frequency identification (RFID) technology, in order to improve standards for the marking, tracing, and record-keeping of conventional ammunition.

Improved marking supports effective tracing by enabling identification and efficient record keeping that can inform through-life ammunition management. As such, international cooperation and assistance towards the exchange of information and technology is key to identifying diversion points and preventing it.

IANSA also acknowledges the considerable effort dispensed in building guidelines and good practices protocols throughout recent years - namely the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines (IATG), the Modular Small-arms-control Implementation Compendium (MOSAIC), and the SaferGuard Programme. IANSA is confident that promoting these guidelines in the implementation of this new set of political commitments will build shortcuts to achieving its goals.

Finally, IANSA underscores the recommendations from the Group of Government Experts to have this new political commitment implemented based on goal-oriented mechanisms, such as the establishment of voluntary national, sub-regional, and regional targets. Civil society remains ready to contribute to the discussions and constructively engage with this process.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.