Open-ended working group on conventional ammunition established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 76/233

Working paper submitted by Brazil, Ghana, Jamaica, Singapore, and Switzerland
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Key inputs from the first Geneva informal dialogue on “International cooperation and assistance for through-life ammunition management: Strengthening means to match needs, expertise and resources”

Background

1. Governments are the principal stakeholders for the safe and secure management of conventional ammunition. At the same time, some States may face challenges in managing their ammunition sustainably throughout the life cycle according to existing international standards and guidelines. International cooperation and assistance is therefore an important instrument to support them to strengthen safety and security of through-life management in the short and long term and to foster national ownership. Mechanisms which bring together needs, resources and expertise are essential for the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of international cooperation and assistance.

2. As a result, the Group of Governmental Experts in 2020 and 2021\(^1\) paid much attention to the issue of international cooperation and assistance. It recommended that any future political commitments on through-life ammunition management be supported by an implementation mechanism at the global level to facilitate international cooperation and assistance.\(^2\) At the first substantive session of the open-ended working group (OEWG) on conventional ammunition in May 2022, many States stressed the importance of the topic for addressing challenges in through-life ammunition management and ensuring the success and sustainability of implementing any political commitments that the OEWG is mandated to elaborate.\(^3\)

3. Recognising the importance of international cooperation and assistance, Brazil, Ghana, Jamaica, Singapore and Switzerland (the co-conveners) decided to co-organise the Geneva informal dialogue series on the topic.\(^4\) As an informal contribution to the OEWG, the series aims at providing a platform for exchange and idea generation on how international cooperation and assistance on through-life ammunition management could be further strengthened. Focusing specifically on how international cooperation and assistance is currently delivered, it seeks to identify key modalities of any new or existing international cooperation and assistance mechanism to support the future political commitments. The first dialogue took place in June and July 2022 in two virtual, interactive sessions, bringing together more than 70 participants from States, UN entities, international and regional organisations, and non-governmental organisations. It sought inputs on the following areas:
   - Needs, expertise and other contributions of donors, recipients and implementers in through-life ammunition management that can be addressed and provided through international cooperation and assistance;
   - Adequacy and potential gaps of existing international cooperation and assistance mechanisms for through-life ammunition management;
   - Avenues for advancing international cooperation and assistance for through-life ammunition management, and the potential need to consider a new global international cooperation and assistance mechanism.

4. This Working Paper attempts to capture key inputs provided by participants with a view to informing the deliberations of the OEWG.\(^5\)

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\(^1\) Group of Governmental Experts on problems arising from the accumulation of conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus, established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 72/55.

\(^2\) A/76/324, para 88.


\(^4\) The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining-Ammunition Management Advisory Team and the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research serve as technical partners of the informal dialogue series.

\(^5\) The first informal dialogue was held under Chatham House Rule. Participants’ inputs in this working paper are not attributed to any particular State or organisation nor do they necessarily reflect the positions of the co-conveners.
Key inputs from the first Geneva informal dialogue

Needs, expertise and other contributions of donors, recipients and implementers that can be addressed and provided through international cooperation and assistance

5. Many participants expressed needs for specific support for both safety, but particularly security aspects of through-life ammunition management. These needs were notably related to the prevention and mitigation of diversion risks, as well as for marking, record-keeping and tracing, physical security and stockpile management, or stability testing as part of ammunition surveillance.

6. Participants also referred to overarching needs. They mostly highlighted (i) mapping and exchange of information on who is doing what in through-life ammunition management, as well as information sharing on safety and security incidents along the supply chain; (ii) more awareness and information on the different assistance mechanisms (global, regional and bilateral) and better coordination among relevant stakeholders (donors, recipients, and implementers, but also inter-agency coordination at national level); (iii) strengthening (cross-) regional approaches, including exchange of lessons learnt and information; (iv) more systematic use of baseline/capacity assessments; (v) strengthening national capacities, including relevant institutions, organisational structures, regulatory frameworks and standards; (vi) availability of assistance for both short-term risk mitigation and long-term capability development.

7. In order to address the identified needs, participants repeatedly called for broadening the scope of international assistance. They stressed that financial assistance is an important, but not the only means through which support can be provided. Other means of support comprise technical expertise and advice, material support and the provision of equipment or technology. Participants also highlighted that they could provide expertise and advice, including to address the immediate risks and consequences of diversion and unplanned explosions. Such expertise and advice could also be shared to assess and strengthen national capabilities or to support the translation of international guidelines into national regulative. It was also seen as a means for sharing experience and lessons learnt.

Adequacy and potential gaps of existing international cooperation and assistance mechanisms for through-life ammunition management

8. Participants identified various gaps in existing international cooperation and assistance mechanisms. These can be broadly summarised as follows:

(i) Limited awareness of available mechanisms and their utility: Participants – especially State representatives – expressed a limited awareness on available international cooperation and assistance mechanisms, how and where to submit assistance requests, and what type of assistance can be provided. There is also a lack of awareness and information on how the different mechanisms fit together. Participants highlighted the challenge that eligibility for certain assistance mechanisms is limited to States that are parties to the related instruments.

(ii) Lack of a holistic, sustainable and long-term approach: Participants highlighted that current assistance tends to focus on short-term and quick impact responses, which involves a limited number of national stakeholders, rather than being holistic. It is often not designed to develop long-term capabilities or to address the systemic safety and security challenges in through-life ammunition management. The short-term funding of certain trust funds was also considered as a challenge for sustainability.

(iii) Lack of support for assessment and prioritisation of needs: Participants underlined that some States lack the capabilities to identify, prioritise and communicate safety and security needs in through-life ammunition management. Although various approaches for assessment and analysis exist (e.g. weapons and ammunition management baseline assessments, capacity assessments, stakeholder and gaps analyses), there seems to be insufficient guidance and training for States in current international cooperation and assistance mechanisms in this regard.

(iv) Limited emphasis on comprehensive ammunition security, as opposed to ammunition safety: Participants generally observed that current international cooperation and assistance mechanisms are mainly utilised for the safety aspects of through-life management and for stockpile management. While these issues were recognised as important, many participants voiced a need for increased attention to identify and mitigate security risks beyond stockpiles, such as through pre-transfer or diversion risk assessments, diversion monitoring and analysis, and information exchange on diversion incidents.
(v) Limited attention to all stages of through-life ammunition management. Some participants suggested that current international cooperation and assistance mechanisms do not cover all stages and therefore called for a new, comprehensive global mechanism. Others expressed the view that current mechanisms partially cover the different stages, but focus on some of them (e.g. stockpiling, destruction) more than on others (e.g. production, pre-transfer, recovery). A third group of participants suggested that while the procedures of current international cooperation and assistance mechanisms cover all stages in principle, the scope of mechanisms is not fully utilised or expertise may not be available to respond to needs (e.g. lack of rosters of experts).

(vi) Lack of modalities to provide expertise and other contributions: Participants – particularly from donor States – highlighted that current international cooperation and assistance mechanisms do not always foresee the provision of non-financial assistance. However, mechanisms are most effective when they allow for a full array of support, including the provision of financial contributions, expertise, equipment, material (e.g. marking machines) and technology donations (e.g. accounting and tracking systems). A few participants also highlighted the requirement for mandates and status of force agreements in order to be able to provide expertise.

(vii) Disconnect between needs and assistance provided: Participants underlined that resources and expertise provided through current international cooperation and assistance mechanisms are not always commensurate with the challenges of some regions. In this regard, it was also highlighted that assistance tends to focus currently more on conflict-affected regions than on non-conflict settings.

Avenues for advancing international cooperation and assistance in through-life ammunition management, and the potential need to consider a new global international cooperation and assistance mechanism

9. Participants suggested most notably the following means through which international cooperation and assistance could be strengthened:

(i) Many participants found that enhanced information sharing would contribute significantly to better understanding and addressing challenges of States and regions in through-life ammunition management. This would apply to the sharing of lessons learnt and best practices, experiences and impact of assistance, including across regions, as well as to the collection and collaboration on data on ammunition diversion and unplanned explosions. Especially with regard to the exchange of diversion data, some participants pointed however to the challenge of data sensitivity.

(ii) It was suggested that mapping at the global level who is doing what and where across assistance mechanisms would enhance international cooperation and assistance by improving coordination and limiting duplication of efforts at the national, sub-regional and regional level. In this regard, participants highlighted the need – and related costs – to sustain such a mapping over time.

(iii) Participants identified that national action plans could be a meaningful way to strengthen international cooperation and assistance, but that guidance and support are needed. Such plans would define the objectives of and means for achieving through-life management, and align national efforts with sub-regional, regional and global objectives and mechanisms. Participants also considered enhancing the use of needs assessments and the formulation of assistance requests essential to bolster international cooperation and assistance. For this to happen, they identified strengthening national capacities as a key ingredient.

(iv) There was broad recognition among participants that greater emphasis in international cooperation and assistance should be put on addressing safety and security challenges across all stages in through-life management (i.e. comprehensive approach) and with the involvement of all relevant national stakeholders (i.e. holistic approach). Some participants observed that such an emphasis needs however trust and coordination among stakeholders as well as continuity of assistance programmes. They also called for balancing short-term risk mitigation and long-term interventions.

10. Many participants underlined the importance of regional mechanisms as the primary avenue for channelling assistance, where they exist, but that they should be adapted in order to better address gaps in through-life ammunition management. Many also stressed that regional organisations could be further strengthened to coordinate and tailor assistance to the needs and challenges of the region. Yet, discussions highlighted a key challenge: in some regions, for instance Asia, there are no well defined mechanisms for through-life ammunition management. Even in cases where such mechanisms exist,
some States may not have access to them. In these circumstances, global-level mechanisms for international cooperation and assistance are all the more important. Similarly, some participants – especially from donor States – indicated that they require a global assistance process to be able to deliver assistance outside their region.

11. Finally, many participants suggested that a global international cooperation and assistance mechanism or process would be necessary, including as an ‘umbrella’ to foster an overview of needs and responses at the global level. In this spirit, a number of participants indicated that such a mechanism could relay requests that it receives to the relevant existing mechanisms at different levels (global, regional, sub-regional, bilateral), thereby strengthening overall coordination. This would also take advantage of what already exists, support regional responses and promote comprehensive programming. It was highlighted that such a model would provide for the needed flexibility to apply the most suitable mechanism, since many States have specific needs or requirements for engaging in international cooperation and assistance. Reflecting upon operationalising a potential global mechanism, a number of participants highlighted the role of and need for a clearinghouse to help assess needs, match them with resources and expertise, facilitate exchanges of lessons learnt and monitor impact of assistance. In turn, some participants considered a new global mechanism as a duplication of efforts and with limited additional impact on the ground. They called for strengthening existing mechanisms. Some raised questions about the added value of a trust fund for ammunition management.

Conclusion

12. Based on the discussions held in the first informal dialogue, the co-conveners believe that the following topics received important support among participants and could be promising ideas for the OEWG to consider or explore further, when deliberating international cooperation and assistance:

- International cooperation and assistance needs to be as global as necessary, and as regional or sub-regional as possible, in support of national implementation. The OEWG could reflect how the political commitments could entail an agile international cooperation and assistance mechanism within the UN that builds on and strengthens what already exists, and promotes complementarity and coherence of international cooperation and assistance at different levels. The need for and role of a clearinghouse also warrant further consideration.

- Essential for effective international cooperation and assistance is to make best use of all relevant mechanisms. This requires a sound understanding of possibilities and limitations of each of them. The OEWG could consider tasking a mapping of the complementarities between international cooperation and assistance mechanisms that would inform the operationalisation of a global UN mechanism. This mapping would also help to increase understanding among policy-makers and practitioners.

- The OEWG could pay particular attention to sustainability in international cooperation and assistance, complementing immediate risk mitigation. To that effect, strengthening the organisational and operational capabilities at the national level is key so that technical assistance provided can be fully absorbed, integrated and utilised by States in the long term.

- The OEWG could promote assessments and analyses as key instruments in international cooperation and assistance for identifying and addressing needs in a comprehensive and sustainable manner.

- The OEWG could promote the understanding that sustainable, effective and efficient international cooperation and assistance requires addressing both safety and security risks at all stages of through-life ammunition management (i.e. whole-of-system approach) and involving all relevant national stakeholders (i.e. whole-of-government approach).

- International cooperation and assistance is most effective when it allows for information sharing, exchange of experiences and lessons learnt. The OEWG could consider the relevance of a venue for information exchanges on experience and lessons learnt in through-life ammunition management. It could discuss further the different needs for information-sharing and reporting related to the political commitments.

- International cooperation and assistance benefits from cross-regional cooperation in through-life ammunition management. The OEWG could consider encouraging cooperation across regions and respective organisations as part of a global international cooperation and assistance mechanism, for instance to exchange experience and develop best practices.