Africa’s role in United Nations disarmament talks continued.

together with a number of Middle Eastern countries, abstained from voting, arguing that an ATT should be pursued through a consensus-based approach, and not a vote. They also raised several concerns surrounding an ATT, one being the potential for it to be politicised in a manner that negatively impacts on the interests of developing countries. Tanzania, while expressing support for the draft resolution, did so on the understanding that specific reference was to be made to small arms and light weapons (SALW) in its operative paragraphs. Several other African states also reiterated their commitment to curbing the illicit proliferation of SALW, as these remain the weapons primarily used in conflicts on the continent. Prior to the approval of the draft ATT resolution, states voted on three of its operational paragraphs, all of which were adopted. These paragraphs call for the establishment of an open-ended working group that is to meet in February 2009 for a planning session to prepare for future substantive sessions. The group is also tasked with assessing areas in which consensus could be reached regarding inclusion into an eventual arms trade treaty. Following the First Committee meeting, action on the resolution was postponed until the Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary) reviewed the resolution’s programme budget implications. The resolution and its operative paragraphs were adopted by the General Assembly in late December 2008. While Zimbabwe initially voted against the resolution at the First Committee, it voted in favour of it at the General Assembly. Only the United States voted against it. A one-day organisational workshop was held in January this year by the open-ended working group to decide on organisational arrangements for the group, dates and venues of substantive sessions after 2009. The working group also developed a provisional agenda for the first substantive session in March this year. There was significant support and consensus on several topics at the 2008 First Committee, particularly on issues relating to nuclear disarmament and the need for stricter controls over arms transfers. While some states have blocked these processes, further international and disarmament can be achieved in 2009 and beyond. This is dependent, however, on the majority of UN member states converting rhetoric into action.

The UN small arms control process: Challenges and opportunities for civil society

by Guy Lamb, Programme Head: Arms Management Programme, ISS

The UN Programme of Action (PoA) to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects is a non-binding global framework which was formulated in 2001.

It is the principal UN instrument for responding to the illegal trade in small arms. In 2006, the PoA implementation process was significantly disrupted due to the inability of UN Member States to reach consensus on the way forward on the PoA. However, in late-2008 the UN General Assembly’s Disarmament and International Security First Committee compiled a resolution that has the potential to reinvigorate the implementation of the PoA. In terms of Resolution 63/72, the UN General Assembly:

- Endorsed the report adopted at the third biennial meeting of states (BMS) on PoA implementation (which took place in New York in July 2008)
- Decided that the next BMS on PoA implementation will take place in 2010
- Decided to convene an open-ended meeting of governmental experts in 2011 to address key PoA implementation challenges and opportunities
- Decided to convene a conference in 2012 to review progress in PoA implementation
- Encouraged states and relevant organisations to convene regional meetings to consider and advance PoA implementation
- Encouraged civil society to strengthen their cooperation with states to foster greater PoA implementation

This resolution presents both challenges and opportunities for arms control civil society organisations. These are discussed below.

Opportunities

The resolution provides for greater political space for civil society organisations to proactively engage with governments on the implementation of the UN process. Previously, a significant number of governments were suspicious of civil society organisations in the small arms control sector, and consequently avoided collaborative ventures. As indicated above, the resolution also endorses the report of the third BMS on PoA implementation, which stresses greater state/civil society cooperation. All UN Member States voted in support of this report at the conclusion of the BMS, with the exception of Iran and Zimbabwe, who abstained. The resolution coincides with a change in the US political administration. The US has consistently opposed most of the elements of the PoA since the formulation of this UN document
The UN small arms control process: Challenges and opportunities for civil society continued.

in 2001. The change from a Republican Party to a Democratic Party government presents opportunities for the global small arms control civil society network to lobby the US administration to be more supportive of the PoA.

Challenges

The report of third BMS, which set the agenda for PoA implementation until 2010, prioritises three key technical areas, namely arms and ammunition stockpile management, marking and tracing, and illicit arms brokering. The comparative advantage of most civil society organisations in the small arms field, however, is in basic arms control advocacy and human rights monitoring. Only a handful of civil society organisations have the necessary expertise and capacity to make useful contributions on such technical matters. The ability of civil society organisations to cooperate with governments on the implementation of the PoA will thus be limited. In addition, the secretariat of International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) does not have the necessary small arms technical expertise. IANSA was established in 1998 as a global civil society network to raise awareness on the negative impact of small arms proliferation and misuse, and promote civil society responses to this problem.

It is therefore essential that relevant civil society organisations educate themselves on the more technical aspects of small arms. In this regard, the IANSA secretariat can play a central role in facilitating such training and skills development. There is also a need for slicker campaigning that links the human rights dimensions of small arms misuse and proliferation to stockpile management, marking and tracing, and illicit arms brokering.

The Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development: Africa staggers on

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In June 2006, during a ministerial meeting on armed violence and development in Swiss city of Geneva, the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development was formulated and subsequently signed by 42 states. The objectives of this declaration are as follows:

- To strengthen exchanges of successful experiences and lessons learnt in developing armed violence prevention and reduction programmes that are sensitive to local and regional conditions
- To strengthen efforts to integrate programmes for the prevention and reduction of armed violence into institutional frameworks and public policies and programmes, as well as national, regional and multilateral development plans and strategies
- To reaffirm support to the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development and to other existing initiatives at local, national and regional levels in Africa that aim at preventing and reducing armed violence
- To agree on an Africa Declaration on Armed Violence and Development

The Nairobi meeting resulted in the formulation of the Africa Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, which, among other aspects, contained practical measures to promote security and prevent and reduce armed violence, thereby enhancing the prospects for sustainable development in Africa. Such measures include preventing the uncontrolled circulation, illicit trade, and illegal supply and use of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and their ammunition.

On 12 September 2008, representatives of 85 states gathered in Geneva to assess the progress made in the implementation of the Geneva Declaration. At the time of the meeting, 97 states were signatories to the declaration, of which 53 were from the African continent.

Global efforts towards the prevention of armed violence were further enhanced in November 2008 when the UN General Assembly unanimously passed resolution A/63/L.27, titled ‘Promoting development through the reduction and prevention of armed violence’. The resolution