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Statement by the Inter-Parliamentary Union
Sixth Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty
Treaty universalization

Engaging parliaments in the universalization and implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty

The world parliamentary community, through a resolution adopted by the 114th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in Nairobi, in May 2006, expressed its deep concerns about the tremendous human suffering in armed conflicts and the associated proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons (SALW). Through that same resolution, the IPU advocated action to reduce the trafficking of SALW and called upon parliaments to, among other actions, encourage their governments to reaffirm their commitment to implement the SALW Programme of Action and to promote the development of an international arms trade treaty to strictly regulate arms transfers on the basis of State obligations under international law and internationally accepted norms and human rights standards.

The landmark Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) entered into force on 24 December 2014. However, despite clear progress, we must recognize that the incidence of gun violence casualties from illicit weapons remains high in Africa and Asia, where 64 countries have either not signed or not ratified the ATT yet. Even though high fatality rates from illicit gun violence seriously jeopardize public safety in these countries, public debate on joining the ATT remains limited and undeveloped, while governments retain their apprehensions of joining the ATT because of its compliance obligations.

In light of this situation, the IPU, the world organization of national parliaments, believes that one option would be to encourage parliamentary intervention to communicate the ATT's value through public debates and outreach to opinion-makers to identify options to contain the harmful impact of illicit weapons proliferation. Parliaments, as the cornerstone of democracy, are best placed to provide alternative channels to legislate and guide safety structures and economic development in their countries. They have a responsibility to review executive action in the interest of public safety and approve ratification of international treaties. They are ideally placed to stimulate public debate to explain the benefits of the ATT directly to the people. It is parliaments that have the obligation to monitor government performance for full implementation of the ATT through legislation, authorize the budget for executive structures, and oversee accountability of State institutions.

The IPU therefore proposes the following draft project, that could potentially be implemented jointly with the ATT Secretariat and State Parties, to advance universalization of the treaty and address the following cross-cutting issues.

- Peacebuilding *to prevent illicit weapons proliferation.*
- Gender equality *to reduce gender-based violence.*
- Sustainable development *to create public safety conducive to promoting the Sustainable Development Goals.*

1. Proposal to address the above needs

The IPU proposes to facilitate the ATT's universalization through a joint project that aims to identify barriers, limitations, benefits and opportunities for States to fully join the ATT. The project would examine the following issues at workshops organized in the African and Asian regions for non-States Parties:

- identify objections in these countries to joining the ATT, and ways to counter such specific objections with country-specific references to ATT obligations and principles
- reach out to parliaments and public opinion-makers to explain the ATT's potential to control illicit arms transfers and regulate legal arms transfers
- build regional networks to foster inter-disciplinary research on ATT implementation and identify new approaches to control illegal arms trafficking and resultant gun violence
- provide new inputs for the ATT's policy options to advance its universalization and implementation.

2. Implementation options

- The joint project proposes to build public data and create knowledge among elected representatives showing that failure to legislate and apply effective controls on illicit domestic arms manufacture, SALW proliferation and trans-border trafficking has serious implications in their countries and regions.
- In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, the project will be conducted in a virtual setting to facilitate knowledge transfer between parliamentarians and the media, and to share with and learn from experts and peers to evaluate illicit SALW risks in a region.
- The virtual workshops will be conducted in a four-stage process:
 - Identify parliamentarians and opinion-makers to champion the ATT's objectives. Build data on the impact of illicit SALW on gun violence, public safety, gender-based violence and the Sustainable Development Goals.
 - Organize virtual meetings to sensitize country representatives to the need for national legislation; advise executive structures on processes being followed in the ATT States Parties; identify initiatives for financial and capacity-building requirements for ATT compliance.
 - Provide communications, data and papers to sensitize public opinion-makers in the media and the executive branches to the public safety needs of populations at risk from gun violence.
 - Engage with the 64 African and Asian countries on developing and strengthening their organizational capacities and ATT reporting procedures. Such engagement will require additional effort in terms of national workshops and capacity-building initiatives. These will be dealt with on country-specific bases.

3. Expected outcomes and deliverables

The project will improve parliamentary and public knowledge of the ATT and its potential benefits for a given society and thus create a climate favourable to debating, signing and ratifying the ATT by means of targeted research, awareness-raising, and capacity-building within structured and documented processes.

Such documentation will include, but is not limited to, knowledge materials on the ATT and pertinent parliamentary good practice, workshop reports including suggested plans of action, assessment reports on establishing dedicated regional frameworks on the implementation of ATT objectives and IPU resolution 2006, and assessment reports on policy options for the ATT on universalization opportunities.

Reports will be disseminated at IPU events in furtherance of the 2006 IPU resolution.

Conclusion

The IPU is looking forward to receiving inputs and views from the ATT Secretariat and States Parties and the broad ATT community on the above draft project. Based on the inputs received and with a view to complementing ongoing ATT universalization efforts, the IPU would then develop a fully-fledged proposal, as well as a specific budget to start fundraising.

The IPU is keen to put at the ATT's disposal its wealth of experience in parliamentary empowerment, including on disarmament matters and to help raising parliaments' interest in and commitment to signing and ratifying the ATT.

Thank you.