

Group of Friends of the Arms Trade Treaty

Background

The Arms Trade Treaty has been in operation for 10 years. The Treaty remains as relevant now as it was when it was conceived, as the only international treaty creating legally binding international standards to regulate the international trade in conventional arms. Over the past decade the ATT has continued to grow and to strengthen, with more and more states joining and implementing the Treaty. However, challenges remain – including slowing rates of universalisation, declining rates of reporting compliance, increasing vacancies in key office holder roles and growing financial pressures creating challenges for the work of the ATT Secretariat.

As part of work to mark the 10th anniversary of the Stimson Center published a report – The ATT at 10 – including a series of recommendations to support the next decade of the Treaty's operation. One of these recommendations proposed “developing a “Group of Friends” of the ATT, which crosses regional boundaries and includes exporting and importing States and other ATT stakeholders which could be a tool to promote treaty universalization and support broader implementation efforts, as well as emphasize that the treaty has benefits to all States”.

An informal ATT Group of Friends could complement existing formal ATT structures to provide a longer-term and cross-cutting view of the ATT and its direction. Within an increasingly challenging multilateral environment, a space where interested States Parties can come together to consider ways to further strengthen the ATT could help to better identify opportunities and anticipate challenges.

Set out below is a draft proposal for a Group of Friends of the ATT, including potential principles of operation, role, activities and format.

Principles of Operation

- **Informality.** The Group will remain an informal, voluntary gathering of interested States Parties. There will be no established internal rules or formal terms of reference.
- **Non-duplication.** The Group will work to avoid duplicating the roles of existing formal ATT structures such as the Working Groups, Committees or the Secretariat.
- **Complementary and supportive role.** The Group will serve as a complementary, flexible forum for open discussion, idea sharing and coordination amongst interested States Parties. Its outputs will be informal and may be shared with formal ATT processes only through voluntary submissions by States Parties, in line with ATT procedures.
- **Alignment with the ATT's Object and Purpose.** The Group's activities are intended to support and reinforce the Object and Purpose of the ATT. Any recommendations or proposals arising from the group must be channelled through the formal ATT mechanisms by States Parties and work towards this end.
- **Open, cross-regional and flexible membership.** Membership is open to all interested States Parties, regardless of region. Participation is voluntary and flexible.
- **Informal coordination.** The Group will coordinate with the ATT Secretariat and the CSP Presidency in an informal, supportive capacity. For example, it may share summaries of discussions if useful, but there will be no formal reporting requirement or expectation.
- **Clear and transparent operations.** The Group will maintain a clear and transparent relationship with the ATT Secretariat and CSP Presidency, providing informal

feedback and sharing information as appropriate, but will not create parallel reporting or decision-making mechanisms. The Groups activities will always be guided by the principle of complementarity with, and support for, the formal ATT structures.

Role and activities

- **Facilitate open dialogue.** The Group will provide a flexible, informal space for open discussion and idea sharing among interested States Parties, outside the remit of formal ATT structures. While the Group may meet on the sidelines of formal ATT meetings, it will also meet outside formal ATT meeting timetables, including during the intersessional period, as useful and as appropriate. This can help to identify shared goals, test new ideas and foster collaboration in an informal environment.
- **Support the ATT's Object and Purpose.** Share ideas to advance the ATT's goals, including outreach, funding and implementation challenges, as well as considering longer-term proposals to reinforce the work of formal ATT bodies.
- **Share information and coordinate informally.** The Group will exchange information on ATT-related activities and discuss upcoming issues and potential challenges. Coordination with the Secretariat, Presidency and other relevant office holders will remain informal. In addition, the Group will provide a summary of its discussions at each CSP to ensure transparency.
- **Feed into formal ATT processes.** Any outputs, such as recommendations or proposals, will be informal and non-binding. States Parties on the Group may wish to voluntarily submit joint statements or working papers through the formal ATT process, in line with established procedures.

Format and membership

- **Informal and open membership.** The Group is open to all interested States Parties, with balanced regional representation. Membership is voluntary and flexible. States may determine their own representation (Geneva-based and/or capitals, as appropriate).
- **Meetings to be in line with the CSP cycle.** Meetings will be convened informally, as agreed by interested members, and may be held on quarterly basis before formal ATT meetings or during the intersessional period if need be.
- **State Party-only membership with ad hoc invitations.** Membership is open to State Parties only. Civil society organisations and other interested stakeholders may be invited to participate on an ad hoc, invitation-only basis, as agreed by the Group.
- **Flexible meetings.** Meetings may be held in person, virtually or in a hybrid format to maximise accessibility and participation.
- **Complementary to existing work.** The Group will determine its work with a view to ensure that the Group's activities seek to complement and reinforce current strands of work within the formal ATT processes.

Current membership

As of 21 August, the following States Parties have joined the Group of Friends of the ATT:

- Argentina
- Australia
- Canada
- France
- Germany
- Latvia
- Mexico

- Panama
- Romania

Membership remains open to all interested States Parties, and this paper will be updated to reflect any additional members who join by the end of the 11th Conference of States Parties.