

The Arms Trade Treaty
Avenue de France 23
CH-1202 Geneva
08 June 2021

To : Representatives of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty.
: Representatives of Signatory States to the Arms Trade Treaty.
: Representatives of Observer States to the Arms Trade Treaty.
: Representatives of International and Regional Organizations.
: Representatives of Civil Society, NGOs and Industry.

Dear Distinguished Representatives,

BACKGROUND PAPER: OPTIONS FOR THE FORMAT OF THE SEVENTH CONFERENCE OF STATES PARTIES TO THE ARMS TRADE TREATY

INTRODUCTION

1. The Seventh Conference of States Parties (CSP7) to the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) is scheduled to take place from 30 August to 03 September 2021, in just under three months' time. In light of the uncertainty brought about by the COVID-19 outbreak and the ability to hold large meetings, the Presidency has been closely monitoring the situation with respect to the Swiss Government's restrictions on the holding of meetings and the measures that have been adopted that will (likely) govern our meeting.

2. There are restrictions in place governing the holding of meetings in Geneva, Switzerland, where CSP7 is scheduled to take place. In addition to the COVID-19 situation and response measures in Switzerland, travel restrictions imposed by most governments around the world, the emergence of new variants of the virus and the state of the vaccination roll-out across the globe, reinforce the conclusion that not all delegates will be able to attend an in-person meeting during the CSP7 agreed dates of 30 August to 03 September at the International Conference Center Geneva (CICG).

3. Accordingly, the ATT community must consider, through an inclusive and transparent process, an alternative format for CSP7 that best serves the objectives of the meeting. I have prepared this background paper, with the assistance of the ATT Secretariat, in an effort to outline the options that are available to us in the current circumstances with respect to the format of CSP7 and to inform stakeholders of the process I intend to adopt to reach agreement on the format of the meeting.

4. The first part of this paper provides an overview of the process for deciding on the format of CSP7, and the second part outlines the options that are available to us with respect to the format of CSP7.

PART 1. PROCESS FOR AGREEING ON THE FORMAT OF CSP7

5. Following the circulation of this background paper to all ATT stakeholders, I have requested the vice-Presidents to hold consultations with their regional groups on the draft options outlined below to gauge their views and preferences. I will then hold a virtual meeting with all ATT Office Holders to give the vice-Presidents an opportunity to share feedback from their consultations with all ATT Office Holders and discuss and agree the proposed format of CSP7 with all ATT Office Holders. Thereafter, I will circulate the outcome of the ATT Office Holders' meeting with States Parties and ask them to endorse the proposed format by (truncated) silence procedure. Finally, an announcement will be made to all ATT stakeholders on the outcome of the silence procedure process, and preparations for CSP7 can begin in earnest.

Timeline

6. In summary, the timeline of steps towards agreeing on the proposed format of CSP7 is as follows:

08 June	Circulate the options paper to all ATT stakeholders for their information
09 – 18 June	vice-Presidents to hold consultations with their regional groups on the draft options paper to gauge their views and preferences Other stakeholders invited to submit written comments on the draft options paper to the President via the ATT Secretariat, (by 18 June) to gauge their views and preferences
21 June	Virtual meeting of all ATT Office Holders to hear the feedback from the vice-Presidents on their consultations and to discuss and agree the proposed format of CSP7 with all ATT Office Holders
22 June	Circulate the outcome of the ATT Office Holders' meeting with States Parties and ask them to endorse the proposed format by (truncated) silence procedure
30 June	Announce the outcome of the silence procedure process – and the format of CSP7 – to all stakeholders

7. Through this process, I hope to be in a position to communicate the format of CSP7 to all ATT stakeholders by 30 June 2021.

PART 2. OPTIONS FOR THE FORMAT OF CSP7

8. As I noted above, it is clear that the measures in place restricting the holding of public meetings as well as the current health and travel restrictions adopted by most states rule out the possibility of all delegates being able to attend a face-to-face meeting from 30 August to 03 September.

9. Some of the other restrictions and limitations that we need to take into account in discussing options for the format of CSP7 include, geographical time differences and the status of tele-communication infrastructure and capabilities in many states, particularly the developing world.

10. In this context, the following three options for CSP7 exist:

- a. Hybrid CSP7 meeting (i.e., a limited number of delegates physically present at the conference venue (CICG) with other delegates participating virtually).
- b. Virtual CSP7 meeting (i.e. video conference held live via e.g., Zoom).
- c. CSP7 key decisions taken via silence procedure.

11. The ATT Secretariat has determined that any costs incurred by the ATT Secretariat associated with holding CSP7 by any of the formats listed above and discussed in detail below can be covered by the funds allocated to or earmarked for venue hire for CSP7.

Option 1: Hybrid CSP7 meeting

12. This option will entail a limited number of delegates physically present at the conference venue (CICG), with other delegates participating virtually. In assessing the feasibility of this option, the following factors are relevant:

Delegation sizes

13. Depending on the number of persons who are permitted to attend meetings in person in Geneva by the time of the Conference, a determination may need to be made as to who will form part of delegations to the Conference and what will be the size of each delegation to the Conference.

Remote Participation

14. This option involves the active participation of delegates remotely by way of making live interventions. This entails a two-way communication process between Geneva and different parts of the world where delegates will be participating from. CICG can capture, prepare and make available data content/feed for the conference proceedings, at its own cost, as was demonstrated during the virtual CSP7 preparatory meetings held in April 2021.

Interpretation

15. The company contracted by the ATT Secretariat to provide interpretation services to ATT meetings, Intercongress, successfully provided interpretation services in all UN languages via the Zoom platform to the CSP7 preparatory meetings held in April 2021.

16. The costs of interpretation via Zoom will be covered by the CSP7 interpretation services' budget. Intercongress has advised that participants planning to make interventions are advised to use headsets with microphones to enhance the sound quality for the interpreters and to ensure the quality of the interpretation.

Accreditation of Delegates and Financial Contributions

17. Accreditation of conference delegates for a hybrid meeting is not provided for in the ATT Rules of Procedure. Nevertheless, as per the approach adopted for CSP6 (which was held by written procedure), every State that registers for CSP7 will be considered to have participated in the Conference and to have been 'in attendance' for the purposes of Rule 5 of the ATT Financial Rules.

Social distancing and hygiene requirements

18. The ATT Secretariat has consulted with CICG on this issue, and CICG has confirmed that it is able to provide conference facilities that comply with social distancing and hygiene requirements. To that end, CICG will arrange the conference room in accordance with social distancing requirements. Each delegate will have a dedicated table and microphone. In so far as hygiene requirements are concerned, CICG will, in addition to the already existing bathroom facilities, position hand sanitizers at different parts of the conference facility.

Meeting times

19. The hybrid meeting would necessitate an adjustment of time to accommodate all regions to some extent. For example, during the Eighteenth Meeting of States Parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, held in November 2020, virtual meetings were held from 10.00-12.00 and 15.00-17.00 Geneva time (CET). The CSP7 preparatory meetings held in April 2021 ran from 12:00 to 15:00 CEST.

Agenda for the meeting

20. The agenda for CSP7 will need to be adapted to the reduced time allocated to the meeting (as discussed above). The number of items on the CSP7 agenda or the time allocated to each item will need to be reduced. For example, the item on general debate can be eliminated altogether, and participants would be invited to send their interventions in writing to be posted on the dedicated ATT webpage at the commencement of the meeting. Eliminating the general debate would save an entire day of Conference.

21. Another option could be to retain on the CSP7 agenda only items with decisions that will impact ATT's future work. For example, consideration and adoption of 2022 budget estimates. Items that can be deferred for discussion in 2022 can be left out of the CSP7 agenda.

Decision making

22. The ATT Rules of Procedure do not make provision for a decision-making process in a hybrid meeting. The question to be considered is how the current decision-making rules designed for a traditional conference can be applied to decision making in a hybrid meeting. A determination must be made regarding how the President can be satisfied that both delegates in the room and delegates participating remotely agree with a decision, and how the vote of remote delegates can be confirmed in the instance of a vote to be cast.

23. One possibility is to formalise all decisions taken during the Conference via silence procedure after the close of the Conference to ensure there are no objections to the decisions before they are considered and recorded as final decisions of the Conference.

Option 2: Virtual CSP7 meeting

24. This option entails all delegates participating in the meetings remotely. In assessing the feasibility of this option, the following factors are relevant:

Remote Participation

25. This option involves the active participation of delegates remotely by way of making live interventions. This entails a two-way communication process between Geneva and different parts of the world where delegates will be participating from. CICG can capture, prepare and make available data content/feed for the conference proceedings, at its own cost, and this can be achieved via the Zoom platform, as was demonstrated during the virtual CSP7 preparatory meetings held in April 2021.

Interpretation

26. The company contracted by the ATT Secretariat to provide interpretation services to ATT meetings, Intercongress, successfully provided interpretation services in all UN languages via the Zoom platform to the CSP7 preparatory meetings held in April 2021.

27. The costs of interpretation via Zoom will be covered by the CSP7 interpretation services' budget. Intercongress has advised that participants planning to make interventions are advised to use headsets with microphones to enhance the sound quality for the interpreters and to ensure the quality of the interpretation.

Accreditation of Delegates and Financial Contributions

28. Accreditation of conference delegates for a virtual meeting is not provided for in the ATT Rules of Procedure. Nevertheless, as per the approach adopted for CSP6 (which was held by written procedure), every State that registers for CSP7 will be considered to have participated in the Conference and to have been 'in attendance' for the purposes of Rule 5 of the ATT Financial Rules.

Meeting times

29. The virtual meeting would necessitate an adjustment of time to accommodate all regions to some extent. For example, during the Eighteenth Meeting of States Parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, held in November 2020, virtual meetings were held from 10.00-12.00 and 15.00-17.00 Geneva time (CET). The CSP7 preparatory meetings held in April 2021 ran from 12:00 to 15:00 CEST.

Agenda for the meeting

30. The agenda for CSP7 will need to be adapted to the reduced time allocated to the meeting (as discussed above). The number of items on the CSP7 agenda or the time allocated to each item will need to be reduced. For example, the item on general debate can be eliminated altogether, and participants would be invited to send their interventions in writing to be posted on the dedicated ATT webpage at the commencement of the meeting. Eliminating the general debate would save an entire day of Conference.

31. Another option could be to retain on the CSP7 agenda only items with decisions that will impact ATT's future work. For example, consideration and adoption of 2022 budget estimates. Items that can be deferred for discussion in 2022 can be left out of the CSP7 agenda.

Decision making

32. The ATT Rules of Procedure do not make provision for a decision-making process in a virtual meeting. The question to be considered is how the current decision-making rules designed for a traditional conference can be applied to decision making in a virtual meeting. A determination must be made regarding how the President can be satisfied that delegates participating remotely agree with a decision, and how the vote of remote delegates can be confirmed in the instance of a vote to be cast.

33. One possibility is to formalise all decisions taken during the Conference via silence procedure after the close of the Conference to ensure there are no objections to the decisions before they are considered and recorded as final decisions of the Conference.

Option 3: CSP7 key decisions taken via silence procedure

34. This option entails taking CSP7 key decisions via silence procedure as contemplated under Rule 41 of the ATT Rules of Procedure. Key CSP7 decisions could be determined by assessing the impact of a decision on ATT's future work. Accordingly, items that can be deferred for discussion and decision in 2022 can be left out of the list of CSP7 key decisions.

Decision making

35. Based on input received from the ATT office holders and the ATT Secretariat, the President will submit proposals for adoption by States Parties via a silence procedure. However, if the silence is broken on any proposal put forward, the proposal shall be deferred for consideration by CSP8.

Accreditation of Delegates and Financial Contributions

36. Since no meeting will be held under this option, no accreditation will happen. With respect to financial contributions, a similar approach could be taken to the one taken for CSP6 whereby all States Parties were assessed as well as any Signatory State or observer State that formally registered for the Conference and appeared on the List of Participants for CSP6.

CONCLUSION

37. In my view, the ATT Working Group meetings and CSP7 Informal Preparatory Meeting held virtually from 26 to 30 April 2021, via the Zoom platform, were a success and gave us a unique opportunity to trial the use of a virtual platform for a large meeting of our stakeholders. Informed by the success of those meetings – as well as some of the lessons learned, my inclination is that we consider conducting CSP7 as a hybrid (option 1) meeting to ensure the maximum participation and broadest engagement possible in the circumstances.

38. Of course, I am open to other suggestions and proposals for the format of CSP7, which is why I am conducting broad consultations on the matter and seeking the advice of all ATT Office Holders. I am conveying my personal views at this early stage merely to express my preferences in a transparent manner, without wishing to pre-empt the decision that States Parties will eventually take.

39. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your support, patience and cooperation during this challenging period.

40. I avail myself of this opportunity to renew the assurance of my highest consideration.

Yours faithfully,



Ambassador Lansana GBERIE
President: Seventh Conference of States Parties to the ATT