



SOUTH AFRICAN STATEMENT TO THE SIXTH CONFERENCE OF STATES PARTIES TO THE ARMS TRADE TREATY

14 August 2020

States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty,
Signatory States,
Observer States,
International and Regional Organizations,
Civil Society, NGOs and Industry,

The severe and unyielding impact of the COVID19 pandemic on countries globally has disrupted daily life and the way of life and work as we know it. We recognise that this pandemic continues to have a devastating impact on us all and we are facing a new reality, which severely hampers the effective implementation of many global instruments, including the related preparations for conferences, as well as the conferences themselves. This has necessitated that we have had to adopt extra-ordinary measures, as witnessed by the format of this Conference. South Africa expresses its gratitude to the President, Bureau, fellow members of the Management Committee, Working Group Chairs and Facilitators, as well as to the Secretariat for the hard work and tireless efforts to prepare this Sixth Conference of States Parties under these exceptional circumstances.

The illicit proliferation of and trade in conventional arms, exacerbated by, *inter alia*, inadequate or weak control systems at the respective national levels, destabilises communities, negatively impacts security and compromises

development. Such deficiencies in national arms control systems run a serious risk of being exploited by unscrupulous officials and arms dealers and brokers, waiting for opportunities to divert arms into the illicit trade. The task of adequately addressing such weaknesses and loopholes are often too insurmountable for developing countries to achieve on their own, without assistance. It is for this reason that South Africa has traditionally strongly advocated the need for international cooperation and assistance in the full implementation of treaty obligations in the field of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. This commitment was borne out by South Africa's appointment as 'Friend of the Chair' on the issues of international cooperation and assistance during the negotiations on the ATT's Article 15 on International Cooperation and Article 16 on International Assistance.

Article 16 stipulates that a States Party may seek assistance in the fields of legislative assistance, institutional capacity-building, and technical, material or financial assistance in areas such as stockpile management, DDR and effective implementation practices. The effective and concrete implementation of these inter-related control measures at the national level is key to regional and global implementation efforts.

Given the fact that many States Parties, including those from the developing world, face concrete challenges in implementing their treaty obligations, South Africa proposes that consideration be given to the creation of a subsidiary body that would promote 'International Cooperation and Assistance' (Articles 15 and 16) in a pro-active manner. Such a subsidiary body, which may take the form of a Committee, could serve as a platform for exchanging information, building partnerships and facilitating interaction between States Parties seeking assistance and those in a position to provide such assistance, including, but not limited to information exchange on best practices, as well as practical and concrete support in the aforementioned areas.

With regard to regional implementation initiatives, the African Union's theme for the year 2020: "Silencing the Guns: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa's Development" is not only a rallying call, it is a fundamental precondition for achieving our Continental priorities of Agenda 2063. The year 2020 also fittingly marks the 20th anniversary of the Bamako Declaration on small arms and light weapons (SALW), the first ever African continental initiative to address the scourge of illicit SALW, adopted by the then-OAU on 1 December 2000.

The African Union Master Roadmap identifies a number of obstacles such as the persistence of illicit transfers and illegal arms transactions as constituting serious threats to the African peace and security agenda. It is unfortunate that as we were intensifying efforts at “Silencing of the Guns”, we have had to shift our focus to developing a comprehensive response to the outbreak and the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, under no circumstances should this global health emergency derail efforts to Silencing the Guns on the continent and to address the illicit transfers and illegal arms transactions worldwide.

The importance of gender equality and women empowerment in achieving “Silencing of the Guns” is central. This year coincides with a number of milestones on the Continent and globally, including the end of the Decade of African Women, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, as well as the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the 5th Anniversary of the Sustainable Development Goals; and the 20th Anniversary of Resolution 1325, on women, peace and security. South Africa agrees that much more needs and must be done on gender and gender based violence. The contribution of women and girls to the peace building process remains undervalued and under-resourced, leaving a vital tool regarding transformative change and sustainable peace glaringly underutilised. South Africa, therefore, continues to encourage the empowerment of women, including through capacity-building efforts to participate in the design and implementation of efforts related to the field of international peace and security. We trust that future discussions would contribute to a better understanding of gender based violence within the framework of the ATT.

The universalisation of the ATT would strengthen the norms to effectively regulate the international trade in conventional arms and to prevent their diversion. Accordingly, we are pleased to note that since the last meeting of States Parties, the six new accessions by Afghanistan, China, Maldives, Namibia, Niue and Sao Tome and Principe have brought the total number of States Parties to 110. It is our hope that China’s accession to the ATT will serve as encouragement to all major conventional arms producers and exporters to do the same. In addition, we call upon all other States that have not yet become States Parties to the ATT to take the necessary steps to ratify or accede to the Treaty.

South Africa reiterates the importance of the Voluntary Trust Fund and the Sponsorship Programme as being key to enhancing, without prejudice,

developing country participation, treaty awareness and ultimately contributing to universalisation and effective implementation of the ATT at national level.

The discussions in the Working Group on Effective Treaty Implementation (WGETI) and the Working Group on Transparency and Reporting (WGTR) will add impetus to the realisation of the goals and the objective of the ATT. While it is unfortunate that the Working Group discussions were curtailed this year, we nonetheless remain optimistic that the resumption of these interactive discussions will yield concrete progress and contribute to our overall treaty implementation efforts. The multi-year work plans for the WGETI discussions unpack the issues in a manner that allows for a full and interactive exchange of views in an informal manner. It is our hope that all perspectives will be accorded due consideration, given the differentiated levels of development of States Parties.

South Africa supports the mandate of the WGTR, which includes exchanges concerning the fulfilment of the reporting obligations, as well as discussions on the draft proposed amendments to both the Initial and Annual Reporting templates, taking into account pertinent comments and concerns of States Parties. However, South Africa wishes to note, for the record, that its preference would be to leave the templates unchanged. Nevertheless, South Africa can go along with Decision 12 on the basis of the clear understanding that until an inclusive and interactive discussion is held on the issues, as opposed to a mere continued exchange of views between States Parties on the one side and the Co-Chairs on the other, it is self-evident that there can be no agreement on amending the templates.

Those promoting amendments to the templates should bear in mind the risks that such an exercise runs in being a deterrent to treaty reporting, which may impact directly on the implementation and universalisation of the ATT.

The issue of non-payment of assessed contributions directly affects the overall implementation and operation of the Treaty, however, it needs to be considered in a holistic manner and cannot simply be seen from the prism of an individual State not paying. There needs to be an overall balance in that measures adopted should be considerate of circumstances and not frustrate any other initiatives within the ATT. In this regard, South Africa supports the restatement that no State will be prejudiced by Financial Rule 8 (1) d in applying for support

from the ATT Voluntary Trust Fund or the ATT Sponsorship Programme until CSP7 when this issue will be discussed in conjunction with a report from the Management Committee.

South Africa appreciates the substantive and administrative support provided over the last four years by the Head of the ATT Secretariat, Mr Dumisani Dladla, which has met and surpassed performance expectations and in view of the evidence-based evaluation conducted, supports the endorsement by this Conference for the continuation of the contract of Mr Dladla for a second term.

In conclusion, while States have had to shift their focus to developing a comprehensive response to the outbreak and the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, South Africa reiterates that the object and purpose of the Treaty will only be achieved when all States Parties move in concert in Treaty implementation and in this regard has confidence that through the decisions adopted at this Conference we would be able to work towards a productive and successful Seventh Conference of States Parties.