

What should the PrepCom achieve?

The UN Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) meeting 9-20 January 2006

This meeting is part of the UN process on small arms.

The process began in July 2001, after years of lobbying by humanitarian organisations for the human cost of gun proliferation to be recognised. At that time, UN Member States unanimously adopted the Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (PoA), a politically-binding agreement aiming to curb the illicit trade in guns. Governments agreed to review the PoA after five years.

The five years will be up in June 2006, when governments will meet again at the UN Review Conference on small arms. The Review Conference will be an opportunity for much greater progress – if governments are prepared to take up the challenge. However, this opportunity may be lost, depending on the outcome of the preparatory meeting over the next two weeks.

At the PrepCom, UN Member States will decide the agenda of the high-level Review Conference in June, ie **which solutions to the problem of gun violence are open for discussion.**

A number of issues, including regulating civilian possession of guns, arms transfers to non-state actors, and tough regulation of arms brokers, were dropped from the text of the PoA in 2001. Experience over the last five years shows that these elements are vital to effective implementation of the PoA, and this must now be recognised.

Many governments would now like to see some of these issues discussed; others, opposed to further controls on gun proliferation, want to restrict discussion to the topics that are already covered by the Programme of Action.

What does IANSA want?

IANSA members are urging governments not only to include the key issues left out in 2001 (see above) in the outcome document of the Review Conference in June, but also to strengthen some of the existing provisions.

For example, in the PoA, states agreed to ensure that small arms transfers were consistent with their existing responsibilities under relevant international law. But there is no shared understanding of what these responsibilities are. Therefore IANSA urges governments to adopt a set of global principles for arms transfers, based on international law, in order to close the legal loopholes exploited by arms dealers.

IANSA is also urging governments to move swiftly towards negotiations for a legally-binding instrument to control arms brokers, wherever they operate.

The current preparatory meeting this January must lay the foundations for this progress. It must ensure that:

- the agenda for the Review Conference is open for discussion of all issues related to gun proliferation;
- non-governmental organisations can participate fully in the meeting, so that the voices of those who are dealing with the daily reality of gun violence are heard;
- decision-making is by vote rather than consensus, so that the tiny minority of states opposed to further controls on gun proliferation no longer have power of veto.

Progress on implementing the existing Programme of Action so far:

In July 2003 and July 2005, states reported on their implementation of the PoA at the Biennial Meetings of States (BMS) at UN Headquarters in New York. Both meetings revealed that governments were making very slow progress on implementing the PoA. Across the Middle East, North Africa and much of Asia almost no small arms commitments have been put into action. Some states in East Africa, East and Central Europe and the Americas had made progress, but there is still much to be done in order to save lives.