



BITING THE BULLET

INTERNATIONAL ALERT | SAFERWORLD | UNIVERSITY OF BRADFORD

Implementation of the PoA in South Asia

Introduction

Between 26 June and 17 July 2006, international governments will meet to review their commitment made five years ago to control small arms and light weapons (SALW). The UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects (PoA) was agreed at a UN Conference in July 2001, and is the primary international instrument relating to the controls of small arms and light weapons.

The PoA sets out a range of measures and initiatives to be taken by states' in areas such as: controls on the import, export and transit of small arms (transfer controls); the regulation of arms brokering; stockpile management; addressing the impact of small arms on development; and the marking and tracing of small arms.

The Biting the Bullet project aims to promote effective implementation of the PoA and periodically it produces a "Red Book" analysing progress against the PoA.

The 2006 Red Book concludes that global implementation of the PoA is patchy. Although progress has been made in some areas, action taken so far has not been sufficient to have more than a local or marginal impact on the problems of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) trafficking, proliferation and misuse. Some of the factors contributing to inadequate performance are linked to weaknesses in the PoA itself. This year's conference provides the first formal opportunity to review and strengthen the PoA since it was agreed.

This Biting the Bullet briefing focuses on the implementation of the PoA in South Asia, highlighting progress thus far, and outlining recommendations for further improvements.

Recommendations for more effective implementation of the PoA in South Asia

- **Developing national strategies for SALW control:** States within the region should give greater priority to SALW issues and, where appropriate, should consider developing comprehensive national strategies or approaches to tackling them.
- **Supporting the development of new comprehensive sub-regional and regional agreements on SALW:** Sub-regional and regional arrangements that reflect South Asian priorities for tackling SALW proliferation should be established. Experience from other regions shows that the development of comprehensive agreements on SALW is key to effective action on SALW. SALW control has not been a prominent part of regional and sub-regional interactions in Asia. There are signs that this could be changing, but sub-regional organisations will need support to build their capacity to develop and implement these agreements.

- **Promoting increased engagement on the part of the donor community.** International donors need to enhance levels of assistance (both financial and technical) to help all states in the Asian region in tackling their SALW problems.
- **Supporting civil society involvement in efforts to tackle SALW proliferation:** There are very few NGOs in South Asia that deal specifically with SALW therefore civil society engagement in many parts of the region has been lacking and undeveloped. Capacity-building, and financial and technical assistance should be provided to civil society groups to help tackle these problems.

Arms proliferation in South Asia

In South Asia, concerns about SALW include armed conflict, violent crime, transnational organised crime, terrorism and separatism. SALW proliferation in the region is the consequence of a combination of factors including internal conflicts in several of the countries in the region, such as **Sri Lanka** and **Nepal**, a lack of effective law enforcement capabilities, expanding insurgent networks such as in **Bangladesh, India** and **Pakistan** and the existence of long and porous borders with poor border controls to tackle illegal arms transits.

Implementation of the UN PoA in South Asia

Sub-regional developments

In South Asia, there is no co-ordinated sub-regional agreement or initiative to tackle the problem of SALW proliferation. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is the only sub-regional arrangement, covering Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. To date, SAARC has avoided engaging in any security issues, viewing them as falling exclusively within national sovereignty and not within their mandate. The lack of sub-regional co-operation on issues relating to security, has meant that these issues are not being sufficiently addressed and the cross-border dimensions of the problem in the Indian sub-continent is compounding the problem.

National implementation

Implementation of the PoA has been very slow at the national level. Some limited basic foundations have been put into place. **Bangladesh, India, Pakistan** and **Sri Lanka** have each provided at least one report on PoA implementation to the UN Department for Disarmament Affairs (UN DDA). Each of these countries has also appointed a national point of contact. **Sri Lanka** has also made good progress and established a National Commission to co-ordinate and monitor all SALW control activities in the country. This is the first and only Commission of its kind in the sub-region. In 2005, a public weapons destruction event was co-ordinated to mark International Arms Destruction Day on 8 July 2005, and 17,000 weapons were destroyed at the event. **Sri Lanka** aside, none of the countries within the sub-region have made any substantive progress in establishing national capacity to implement the PoA.

India has been involved in promoting several international initiatives on SALW. It has been a strong advocate for comprehensive controls on marking and tracing and has sought a legally-binding instrument in this regard which includes controls on ammunition. **India** is also closely examining the possibility of developing a legal instrument to prohibit the transfer of weapons to non-state actors.

Further information

- *Promoting Effective Global Action on Small Arms: Priorities for the 2006 UN Review Conference*, Biting the Bullet Project (International Alert, Saferworld and University of Bradford), January 2006
- *Implementing the Programme of Action 2006: Action by States and Civil Society*, Biting the Bullet (International Alert, Saferworld and University of Bradford), June 2006
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- *Small Arms and Light Weapons: Challenges in Sri Lanka and Options for the Future*, SASA-Net Sri Lanka, Saferworld, May 2006