

## **UN First Committee update – November 2004**

At its meeting in October the UN First Committee on Disarmament and International Security again focussed on halting the proliferation and misuse of small arms. While many states pointed to progress made against the illicit trade in small arms at the regional, national and international levels, others continued to express their grave concern at the devastation still being wreaked by guns trafficking.

Several states emphasised the negative impact of small arms proliferation on the consolidation of peace in post-conflict situations and on sustainable development. States also reiterated their full support for the implementation of the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms (PoA), and many expressed their support for the continuation of consultations at the UN on controls of arms brokers. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) called on states to mandate an Expert Group to develop proposals for an international system of controls on arms brokers. Several states also expressed their concern regarding the access of non-governmental actors to small arms and light weapons.

States also held informal consultations on the currently negotiated instrument on tracing illicit small arms, including issues regarding the instrument's scope and definitions, record-keeping, cooperation in tracing, implementation, and final provisions. Many states continue to argue for a legally binding instrument, and there is support for the inclusion of small arms-related ammunition in the instrument. However, other states, including the USA, oppose both the adoption of a legally binding instrument and the inclusion of ammunition. There is also no consensus yet on the possible role of Interpol in assisting states in tracing illicit small arms.

Specific decisions taken at the First Committee include the dates for the future meetings on the UN PoA. The UN conference to review progress made in the implementation of the PoA will be held in New York for a period of two weeks between 26 June and 7 July 2006. A preparatory committee for the conference will meet in New York from 9 to 20 January 2006. The second Biannual Meeting of States to review the implementation of the PoA will be held in New York from 11 to 15 July 2005.

Falling short of the recommendation made by the ICRC, the First Committee only requested the UN Secretary-General to continue to hold broad-based consultations on further steps to enhance international co-operation in combating illicit brokering in small arms. The committee further encouraged states to ensure a positive outcome for the negotiations on a tracing instrument for small arms, and to voluntarily submit to the UN national reports on the implementation of the UN PoA.

In addition, members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sponsored a resolution on assistance to states for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms, and collecting them. The resolution calls on the international community to support the implementation of the Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Small Arms in West Africa, and to provide technical and financial support to strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations to take action to combat the illicit trade in small arms.

A further resolution sponsored by 80 states encourages international assistance to states to collect and destroy small arms in post-conflict situations. Also, a resolution sponsored by 58 states on the prevention of the illicit transfer and unauthorised access to, and use of, man-portable air defence systems. The resolution encourages states to: enact or improve national controls over access to, and transfer of, man-portable air defence systems to prevent the illicit transfer and unauthorised access to, and use of, such weapons; to ban the transfer of such weapons to non-State end-users; and to ensure that such weapons are exported only to governments or agents authorised by a government.

The texts of these and other resolutions adopted by the First Committee are available via <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com04/res/resindex.html>