

Iowa High School Model United Nations

Political and Security

Small Arms Trafficking Regulations

Author: Rachel Zidon (zidonr@uni.edu)

Background

Small arms—weapons including, but not limited to, hand guns, pistols, sub-machine guns, mortars, landmines, grenades, and light missiles—have played a significant role in violence worldwide in times of peace and war (Global Issues). Eight million small arms are produced annually, and of those, one million are lost or stolen. Every day, small arms are responsible for over 1,000 deaths worldwide. Because they are easily accessible and usable, small arms are a choice weapon for guerilla fighters and terrorists and have been used to perpetrate rape, civil war, terrorism, violence, crime, and genocide (Control Arms).

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has said that small arms are the main weapons in conflicts worldwide, and a 2006 UN report showed that while small arms do not always create conflicts, they have played a major role in lengthening and intensifying them (UN News Center). Small arms have been used in the Darfur region of Sudan, the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, ethnic conflicts in the Balkans in the 1990s, drug trade throughout Latin America, regional conflicts in the Middle East and Asia, and a wide variety of other global conflicts, and as such, the UN has worked and continues to work toward ending small arms trafficking (Small Arms Survey).

What Has Been Done/Past U.N. Actions

In 1999, the Security Council held a special meeting on small arms trade. Member states, including the United Kingdom and Canada, pushed to have all small arms marked so their sale could be traced more effectively. However, China opposed such regulations, so this regulations were not passed (BBC—UN targets small arms). In 2001, the UN formed the Program of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons, with the goals of making illicit gun production/possession a crime, destroying surplus small arms, tracking existing arms, and better enforcing arms embargos, among others (UN Programme of Small Arms and Light Weapons). However, as current statistics on small arms suggest, these efforts have been largely ineffective.

In 2003 and 2005, the UN held a Biennial Meeting of States as follow-ups to the Program of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons. During these meetings, member states explained their views on issues involving small arms trade and what their states had done to end small arms trafficking (Small Arms at the UN). In 2006, the UN held the Small Arms Review Conference in hopes of creating regulations to end small arms trafficking but was ultimately unable to come to a compromise that all participating states could agree on (BBC—Deal eludes small arms conference).

Possible Solutions

Possible solutions include creating a registry for all existing small arms to track their sale, adopting laws that would make private sale and ownership of small arms a criminal offence, creating stockpiles of existing small arms and destroying them, ending shipments of weapons to areas of conflict, creating an international registry of small arms, better enforcing existing embargos on small arms, requiring licenses for all people involved in producing, shipping, and selling small arms, and notifying states of any incoming or outgoing arms shipments (UN News Center). The biggest barrier to solving this problem is winning the support of all member states. The United States, Britain, and France are the world's top sellers of small arms, and any proposed amendment would need their support, as well as all other member states' support, to be effective (Global issues). Without the support of all states, people will always have sources for small arms trafficking, and the problem and the violence will continue.

Questions to Consider

How can the UN reduce illegal small arms trade?

What have the UN's past actions on this issue accomplished? What further actions need to be taken to end illegal small arms trade?

How can the UN enforce any rules governing illegal small arms trade?

Can the UN convince all member states to agree on one solution to end small arms trafficking?

How can the UN track down and destroy small arms already in the hands of people who shouldn't have them? What or who should determine who should be allowed to possess small arms?

Consulted/Recommended Sources

Global Issues: Social, Political, Economic and Environmental Issues That Affect Us All. <<http://www.globalissues.org/issue/73/arms-trade-a-major-cause-of-suffering>>.

Control Arms. <<http://www.controlarms.org/en/>>.

UN News Center.

<<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26518&Cr=disarmament&Cr1=>> and <<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs//2008/sc9316.doc.htm>>.

Small Arms Survey <<http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/index.html>>.

BBC—Deal eludes small arms conference. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/5160238.stm>>.

BBC—Deal targets small arms. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/457224.stm>>.

UN Programme of Small Arms and Light Weapons. <<http://www.iansa.org/un/programme-of-action.htm>>.

Small Arms at the UN. < <http://www.iansa.org/un/index.htm> >. (List of individual member states' statements at the BMS at < http://www.iansa.org/un/government_statements.htm >.)

Resolution on Small Arms. < http://www.unodc.org/pdf/crime/a_res_55/255e.pdf >.

Signatories to the CTOC firearms protocol.

<<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CTOC/countrylist-firearmsprotocol.html> >.

Security Council Report on Small Arms.

<http://www.iansa.org/un/documents/sg_report_salw08.pdf >.