

# **Illicit flow and financing of arms in Africa**

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## **Illicit flow and financing of arms in Africa: Sources of conflict and impediment to silencing the guns'**

Tomorrow (24 May) the Peace and Security Council (PSC) will have a briefing session on the theme of 'Illicit flow and financing of arms in Africa: Sources of conflict and impediment to silencing the guns'. The PSC is expected to receive a briefing from the Regional Centre on Small Arms (RECSA) and the AU Peace and Security Department (PSD), particularly its division on Defense and Security. Others who will participate in this session include members of the UN Security Council (UNSC) and representatives of Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs).

This session is convened within the framework of the 430th meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council, held on 24 April 2014 under the theme 'Silencing the Guns: Pre-requisites for Realising a Conflict-Free Africa by the Year 2020' which identified the curbing of illicit flow of light and small weapons as one of the measures requested for achieving the AU agenda of silencing the guns by 2020. As reflected in the agenda for this session, this session is designed to support the efforts of the AU to achieve its aim of silencing the guns and adopt decisions identifying measures that help in preventing illicit flow of arms and its financing.

One of the aims of the session is to understand current dynamics in the flow of arms and their financing in Africa. The briefing from RECSA is expected to provide insights on patterns and trends in arms and ammunition inflows, illicit

circulation, and gaps in control measures. It is in particular expected to share the experience of the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes regions in terms of both the challenges these regions face due to illicit flows and financing of arms and the measures being taken to address these challenges.

The briefing from PSD is expected to highlight the role of illicit flow of arms in fueling and sustaining conflicts, in the displacement of peoples, in disrupting development efforts and the scale and nature of casualties inflicted on civilians. In this regard, mention can be made of how the illicit flow of arms from Libya in the aftermath of the collapse of Col Gadhafi's regime fueled the conflict in Mali and the surge in acts of terrorism and groups engaged in such acts in the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin regions of Africa. It is also worth noting that the changing character of conflicts in Africa that witnessed the proliferation of small and poorly organized militias, insurgents, terrorist groups and criminal networks is partly attributed to easy access to illicit flow of weapons.

At the AU level, the policy framework that serves as point of departure is the 'African Common Position on illicit circulation, proliferation and trafficking of small and light weapons' (SALW), also known as the Bamako Declaration of 2000. This declaration commits member states to identify, seize and destroy illicit weapons. In January 2017, the AU Assembly adopted the AU Master Roadmap on Practical Steps to Silence the Guns by 2020. As a follow up to this master roadmap, in September 2017 the PSC declared the month of September an amnesty month for the Surrender and Collection of Illicit Weapons. As noted in our 'Insight' on the PSC Field Mission to Sudan, Darfur, one of the stabilization efforts being implemented in Darfur is the collection of weapons.

At sub-regional levels, important normative and institutional developments have taken place, including with the adoption of binding treaties. These include the 2001 SADC Protocol, the

2004 Nairobi Protocol for the Great Lakes Region, the Horn of Africa and Bordering States, the 2006 ECOWAS Convention, and the 2010 Central Africa Convention.

Member states of the PSC would expectedly share their experiences with respect to illicit flow and circulation of weapons as well as its consequences and their efforts to address the threat that illicit flow and circulation of SLWPs poses. In terms of the efforts of the AU, it would be of interest to PSC member states to know why illicit flow and circulation of weapons persist despite the various legal and institutional regimes put in place and the various interventions both at AU and regional levels.

For PSC member states and the wider AU system, this session presents an opportunity not only to take stock of the policy and institutional architecture but also the steps that are required for both enhancing the effectiveness of the legal and institutional regime for curbing illicit flow of SALW and implementing practical measures for countering illicit flow and circulation of SALW at national, regional, continental and global levels. With respect to the legal and institutional regimes, one of the major challenges remains to be non-ratification and lack of adherence to the measures stipulated in the various regional conventions. The universal ratification and implementation of these legal instruments is thus necessary. Regional level efforts should include the strengthening of the legal and security measures for cracking down entry points and trafficking routes, arms dealers, including the activities of brokers and the sources of financing of the illicit flow, sell and circulation of SALW.

There is a need for regionally targeted approach to the challenge of illicit flows. The nature of the problem and its manifestations are not the same in the different regions of the continent. It is necessary in this regard that targeted interventions are designed and implemented in collaboration with RECs/RMs for parts of the continent most affected by the

illicit flow and use of illicit weapons or arms. The measures to be taken in this regard include not only the strengthening of control measures and coordination between member states but also implementation of programs for collection of weapons and for the effective physical security and management of stockpiles.

At the national level, issues that need attention include corruption and the strengthening of the regulatory measures for effective control, management and protection of SALW. Indeed, weak regulatory framework, including poor protection and management of stockpiles, and corruption often lead to diversion of legally sourced arms through leakages and raids by illegal non-state actors.

Given the global dimension of the movement and circulation of arms, the agenda for this session recognizes the need for the AU to work with international actors. In this respect, the agenda envisages a plan for the PSC, through its Chair with the support of the African members of the UNSC (A3) and the AU Commission, to brief the UNSC on Africa's efforts for silencing the guns with a view to have a UNSC resolution calling on different arms producing countries to implement arms certification, including end user certification. Another avenue for effective follow up is the expected review of the UN Program of Action on small arms during 2018. The PSC can articulate African common position on this review addressing issues including transparency in small arms production and sell, the obligation of tight regulation and accountability measures by producing countries of the transfer of SALW and weapons registers as well as standardization of certification. The expected outcome of the session is a communiqué.