



Beijing meeting on African peace and security: combating illicit small arms and ammunition

Beijing, 18 March 2014

Around 60 Chinese and other international officials and experts gathered in Beijing on 18 March 2014 to discuss collaborative actions to fight against illicit small arms and ammunition in Eastern Africa.

The seminar entitled 'Supporting Peace and Security in Africa: Towards Collaborative Actions for Combating Illicit Small Arms and Ammunition' brought together 63 senior international arms control officials and experts, Chinese officials, scholars and think-tanks, as well as diplomats and representatives from international organisations based in Beijing.

This one-day seminar, which was co-hosted by Saferworld, the China Arms Control and Disarmament Association (CACDA) and the Africa Peace Forum (APFO), with sponsorship from the European Union (EU), was held under the aegis of the Africa-China-EU Expert Working Group (EWG) on Conventional Arms. It was the fifth in the series of policy seminars after rotating among Brussels (November 2012 and November 2013), Beijing (May 2013) and Nairobi (July 2013).

Keynote speeches were delivered by, among others, the Hon Pereira A. Silima, Deputy Minister of Home Affairs of Tanzania; Mr Theoneste Mutsindashyaka, Executive Secretary of Regional Centre on Small Arms in the Great Lakes Region the Horn of Africa and Bordering States (RECSA); Mr Ji Haojun, Deputy Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Department of the Chinese Foreign Ministry; Mr Chen Kai, Vice-President and Secretary General of CACDA; and Amb Ochieng Adala, Acting Executive Director of APFO.

Refocusing small arms interventions on impact

Participants noted that for Africa, small arms and light weapons (SALW) are the real weapons of mass destruction. SALW encourage violence, impair

traditional means of conflict resolution, and result in a loss of security. The proliferation of SALW affects not only security, but also strongly disrupts economic development devastates communities, and brings down countries. Most conflicts in Africa erupt from internal clashes within society that are fuelled by the use of SALW. Numerous and large conflicts in East Africa have contributed to the proliferation of SALW in the region. Conflict leads to the decline of a state's capacities to provide security to its own people, while quantities of SALW being released from arsenals into the hands of ordinary people and criminals, spark and fuel conflict in new areas. Meanwhile, the lack of systematic collection and destruction of illegal SALW that are in circulation in a post-conflict society leaves a huge security risk, with people turning to arms when conflict breaks out.

It was also noted that as a response, several initiatives and instruments have been introduced at regional and national level. Regional initiatives are crucial to the effectiveness of tackling illicit SALW, as conflict in one country affects the flow of weapons in other countries as well, e.g. the conflict in Libya has impacted on weapons flows to neighbouring countries and regions. While many initiatives have been implemented, several common challenges and difficulties have emerged. In particular, seminar participants stressed the problems relating to: a lack of legal framework at the national level; variable levels of political will; differences in legal requirements among member states; weak monitoring, evaluation, and reporting on SALW; lack of co-ordination among and involvement of key stakeholders; and limited attention given to prevention measures.

This analysis was followed by two case studies from Kenya and South Sudan to reflect the linkages between broader global/regional/national policies and local initiatives. Through highlighting the involvement of civil society in all aspects of relevant initiatives and activities at national and community level – such as policy development, research and training activities –

the presenters managed to illustrate how broader policies and local initiatives interact with and can complement each other.

The presentations opened up further discussion on: the role of sub-regional organisations such as RECSA in generating political will; co-ordinating member states; co-operating with Regional Economic Communities (RECs); channelling related issues into the existing policy frameworks, such as the Forum on China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC); and measures to prevent weapons being diverted into illegal possession.

International community ready to join forces

It is largely agreed that any solution to illicit SALW and ammunition in Eastern Africa will require an integrated approach and international collaboration.

Seminar participants welcomed the adoption by the UN General Assembly on 2 April 2013 of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), which has been officially signed and ratified by a large number of countries.¹ It is widely expected that the Treaty will enter into force by the end of 2014. The ATT has a huge potential to help tackle the problem of illicit SALW and ammunition in East Africa. It complements existing regional and international agreements on small arms, such as the Nairobi Protocol and the UN Small Arms Programme of Action (UN PoA), and could create synergies if co-ordination among all these instruments across national and regional levels is established. One major contribution of the ATT to improving the control of SALW is the obligation it places on States Parties to establish and maintain a control system to regulate the international movement of conventional arms, including SALW and ammunition. Crucially, the ATT establishes clear international standards for the international transfer of conventional arms, including SALW and ammunition, which are based on a set of objective criteria rooted in international law. As such, implementation of the ATT has the potential to reduce levels of illicit SALW and ammunition in circulation globally and regionally. Therefore, many participants stressed the importance for as many states as possible to sign, ratify, and implement the Treaty.

EU policies and practice in supporting peace and security in Africa were also presented. At the international level, UN frameworks and international instruments – including the UN PoA and the ATT – are key objectives that the EU supports. In addition to the political track, the EU has been devoting significant resources to support concrete initiatives and projects, including in the Eastern African region.

A good example is the financial support provided to RECSA with a view to (a) strengthening the SALW institutional framework in a number of RECSA countries, (b) building partnerships and enhancing trans-regional co-operation, and (c) supporting effective SALW management, notably through the distribution of effective arms-marking machines.

At regional and sub-regional levels, the EU aims to strengthen partnership and co-operation in SALW approaches through a variety of programmes. These include providing financial support to the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) for SALW programmes in the region; supporting development of national action plans; strengthening capacities and raising awareness with regional and national stakeholders; encouraging co-operation and co-ordination among regional law enforcement agencies, for instance, involving police chiefs; distributing arms-marking machines; and offering specific training seminars.

A third dimension is to support dialogue and seek collaborations with third parties on these issues, such as by supporting the Africa-China-EU dialogue on conventional arms control.

Key lessons from all the assistance programmes indicate the importance of comprehensive and effective national needs assessments that allow for setting the appropriate priorities. Looking ahead, the EU is supporting the i-Trace project, a new initiative aimed at supporting a user-friendly global reporting mechanism on illicit SALW and other illicit conventional weapons and ammunitions. EU Member States have also agreed an ambitious programme for ATT implementation.

A number of participants commented positively on EU policies and actions in this area.

Chinese experts noted that, like the EU, China attaches great importance to international and multilateral efforts to tackle illicit SALW and ammunition. It also shares the view that regional and sub-regional co-ordination is key to the fight against illicit small arms. Funding and personnel training has been provided through the UN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), FOCAC, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Meanwhile, at a bilateral level, training for capacity building of security providers and law enforcement agencies – along with technical and financial assistance to help address humanitarian problems caused by mines or explosive weapons in wars – have been delivered to many countries. Chinese experts noted that China would continue its prudent attitude towards exporting SALW and abide by its three fundamental principles: reinforcing the self-defence capabilities of the arms recipient country; avoiding injury to the peace, security and stability of the region concerned and the world as a whole; and non-interference in the internal affairs of the recipient country. Meanwhile, efforts have been put in place to

¹ On 2 April 2014, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the UK joined 13 other states in ratifying the ATT at the United Nations in New York. This brings the total number of states that have ratified the ATT to 31, while to date 118 countries have signed the Treaty. The Treaty will come into force 90 days after the deposit of the 50th instrument of ratification.

tackle China's domestic illicit possession of firearms. China will continue to support the UN as the main channel for addressing problems and threats related to the illicit circulation of SALW and ammunition. It will also call for international co-operation to be further strengthened, and for the capacities of national governments to be enhanced. There is a strong political will in China to support peace and security in Africa, as this is listed as one of the five key thematic areas for China-Africa co-operation within the FOCAC framework. China is committed to "support African countries' effort to combat illegal trade and circulation of small arms"² and is willing to provide assistance through FOCAC to African countries. However, the framework is still to be further explored and fully mobilised/realised.

Supporting Africa-China-EU dialogue on conventional arms

In June 2012, Saferworld, together with CACDA and APFO, launched a two-year project to support Africa-China-EU dialogue on conventional arms. The project is funded by the EU in accordance with an EU Council Decision of February 2012 and aims to facilitate dialogue and co-operative actions among Africa, China and the EU to address the proliferation of conventional arms, focusing on combating illicit SALW in Africa, and on the UN ATT process.

During the past 18 months, a number of activities have been conducted, including the establishment of an Africa-China-EU EWG on conventional arms and of a resource centre on conventional arms control; four EWG meetings and four thematic seminars focusing on the ATT and the problems of SALW in Eastern Africa; an EWG study visit to South Sudan; numerous bilateral meetings with key interlocutors; and one comprehensive stockpile assessment commissioned by the EWG in Somalia.

This project has helped to generate greater awareness and acts as a platform for dialogue among civil society and officials from China, the EU, EU Member States and African countries on combating illicit SALW in Africa, especially in Eastern Africa. There has been increased engagement from all parties involved, including senior Chinese military experts who have also been involved in some of the research activities carried out in Africa. Discussion of the ATT process has enabled the audience to clarify the latest development of the process, and also the stances and plans of different countries – including China – regarding the Treaty.

To build upon what has been achieved, there is a need to continue this dialogue, with the EWG as its driving force, and with key stakeholders in Africa,

China and Europe actively engaged. The EWG will continue to support countries in the region to clearly define their needs and effectively communicate their official requests for assistance from international actors such as the EU, EU Member States and China. It will also assist them in matching their needs to external assistance and linking their requests to existing political frameworks. Meanwhile, there is a strong sentiment that the future work of the EWG should be focused on more joint research activities and analyses.

Practical recommendations for collaborative actions

The seminar resulted in an open and frank exchange of opinions among officials and practitioners from African countries, China, and the EU Member States on experiences and lessons learnt from respective practices. The general belief was that through a series of dialogues, consultations, and research activities conducted by the EWG, a solid foundation had been laid for mutual understanding and goodwill. Participants also agreed that efforts through a trilateral approach have added significant value to the existing initiatives and programmes, and that it is time to agree on practical joint actions. Constructive recommendations were made and shared throughout the seminar, with an emphasis on measures to deal with the excessive accumulation and uncontrolled circulation of small arms in East Africa. Such measures include: increasing the political will of African states through a bottom-up approach; enhancing monitoring and reporting on weapons flows; mandating UN peacekeeping missions to tackle illicit SALW in host countries; and supporting the capacity building of the African Standby Force.

Stockpile management, together with personnel and institutional capacity building, were repeatedly mentioned as key areas for technical assistance, and as priority areas for potential trilateral collaboration. Based on the findings of the study visit to South Sudan and the technical assessment in Somalia, the EWG will look further into the feasibility of joint actions in these two areas and will work out a set of practical recommendations in their next meeting due to take place in May in Nairobi.

For more information on the seminar, please contact Bernardo Mariani, Saferworld's Head of China Programme, at: bmariani@saferworld.org.uk.

² The Fifth Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Beijing Action Plan, Item 2.6.1. The full version can be viewed at <http://www.focac.org/eng/ltada/dwjbzjhys/hywj/t954620.htm>.

List of participants (keynote speakers listed in bold)

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About Saferworld

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We are a not-for-profit organisation with programmes in nearly 20 countries and territories across Africa, Asia and Europe.

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