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FACT SHEET

United Nations Programme of Action

The Problem

Unlike tanks and fighter jets, guns are cheap and portable.

The trafficking, proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons pose a grave threat to human security.

Small Arms **Kill** 1,000 people a day, worldwide

Small Arms **Injure** 3 people for every 1 person killed

Small Arms **Equip** 10,000 child soldiers

Small Arms **Starve**, causing 35 per cent of all food emergencies

Small Arms **Deprive** low-income countries
of approximately \$50-billion (U.S.) per year – 250 per cent of their GDP

Small Arms **Cost** the United States approximately \$100-billion per year,
including costs to the health-care system as well as lost earnings and productivity

The Call

The threat of small arms and light weapons has a long history. But it was not until the end of the Cold War that the threat began to command international attention.

In 1993, Mali requested international assistance to control small arms within its territory. The request was unprecedented, and the United Nations was called on to produce a new program to address it.

The Program

In July 2001, the United Nations held a Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms in All Its Aspects. The resulting document—The UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA)—became the first and only politically binding agreement on preventing and reducing the illicit trafficking and proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

The Commitment

Though not a legally binding document, the PoA has been endorsed by consensus at a high political level. It is therefore seen as a commitment by states to practically address the problems associated with small arms and light weapons.

Under the PoA, states agree to do the following.

- Criminalize the illicit production and possession of small arms and light weapons
- Establish a national co-ordination agency on small arms and light weapons
- Identify and destroy stocks of surplus small arms and light weapons
- Manage stockpiles more effectively
- Issue end-user certificates for exports and transit
- Notify the original supplier of re-export
- Support the Disarmament, Demobilization & Re-integration (DDR) of ex-combatants
- Support regional agreement and encourage import moratoria
- Mark small arms and light weapons at point of manufacture for identification and tracing
- Maintain records of small-arms-and-light-weapons manufacture
- Engage in more information exchange
- Ensure better enforcement of arms embargoes
- Ensure maintenance of comprehensive and accurate records on small-arms-and-light-weapons transfer, holding and production
- Include civil society in efforts to prevent small-arms-and-light-weapons proliferation

The Limits

The UN PoA does not do the following.

- Indicate how to regulate the 75 per cent of the world's small arms owned by civilians
- Focus equal attention on the demand for small arms and light weapons as it does on the supply
- Legally bind signatories. The PoA is not a treaty and cannot be enforced by judicial processes
- Recognize or acknowledge that men and women are differently affected by gun misuse and injury