

# Report

August 2024



## REALITIES, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

### The Arms Trade Treaty in the Indo-Pacific Region

Andrea Edoardo Varisco, Manon Blancafort,  
Yulia Yarina, and David Atwood





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**Cover photo:** After a rehearsal ahead of Independence Day celebrations, a member of the Sri Lanka armed forces stands next to a towed field gun, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 31 January 2019.

Source: Reuters/Dinuka Liyanawatte

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## List of abbreviations and acronyms

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| <b>ASEAN</b>   | Association of Southeast Asian Nations   |
| <b>ATT</b>     | Arms Trade Treaty  |
| <b>BAFA</b>    | German Federal Office for Economic Affairs and Export Control  |
| <b>CAVR</b>    | Centre for Armed Violence Reduction  |
| <b>CCM</b>     | Convention on Cluster Munitions  |
| <b>CHT</b>     | Chittagong Hill Tracts   |
| <b>CSO</b>     | Civil society organization   |
| <b>CSP</b>     | Conference of States Parties   |
| <b>EU</b>      | European Union   |
| <b>FSM</b>     | Federated States of Micronesia   |
| <b>HS</b>      | Harmonized System  |
| <b>ITI</b>     | International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons |
| <b>KII</b>     | Key informant interview  |
| <b>LTTE</b>    | Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam   |
| <b>MANPADS</b> | Man-portable air defence systems   |
| <b>NAP</b>     | National action plan   |
| <b>NISEA</b>   | Nonviolence International Southeast Asia   |
| <b>OMM</b>     | Ocean Maritime Management Company, Limited   |
| <b>PIF</b>     | Pacific Islands Forum  |
| <b>PNG</b>     | Papua New Guinea   |
| <b>PNGDF</b>   | Papua New Guinea Defence Force   |
| <b>SAARC</b>   | South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation   |
| <b>SIPRI</b>   | Stockholm International Peace Research Institute   |

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| <b>STMA</b>        | Strategic Trade Management Act  |
| <b>TIV</b>         | Trend-indicator value   |
| <b>TPNW</b>        | Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons  |
| <b>UN Comtrade</b> | United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database  |
| <b>UNGA</b>        | United Nations General Assembly   |
| <b>UN PoA</b>      | United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons |
| <b>UNRCPD</b>      | United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific                                      |
| <b>UNROCA</b>      | United Nations Register of Conventional Arms  |
| <b>UNSC</b>        | United Nations Security Council   |
| <b>UNSCAR</b>      | United Nations Trust Facility Supporting Cooperation on Arms Regulation   |
| <b>VTF</b>         | Voluntary Trust Fund  |
| <b>WGETI</b>       | Working Group on Effective Treaty Implementation  |
| <b>WGTR</b>        | Working Group on Transparency and Reporting   |
| <b>WGTU</b>        | Working Group on Treaty Universalization  |

## Executive summary

The Indo-Pacific region, in all its vastness and diversity, presents many international security challenges. It is also a region with, thus far, limited engagement with the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). This Report addresses key features of this seeming conundrum.

Through a range of research methodologies, including key informant interviews (KIIs) with policymakers and practitioners in many of the countries and organizations of the region, the Report examines the realities of the conventional arms trade—both licit and illicit—in the Indo-Pacific region. It unpacks differing attitudes to the ATT and identifies key challenges that hinder ATT universalization and compliance in the region. The Report ends with a series of key entry points and opportunities for changing the dynamic of engagement with the ATT in the Indo-Pacific region, which are outlined for the consideration of actors and stakeholders working on the universalization and implementation of the ATT.

The Report identifies the following possible entry points and opportunities for enhancing universalization for consideration for action: targeting signatory states and states showing a willingness to join; deepening understanding of states' security challenges; focusing on particular dimensions of the arms trade in the region, such as maritime and brokering aspects; building national consensus towards the ATT through inter-agency processes; encouraging exchanges on 'lessons learned' between states parties and sceptical states; and fostering subregional processes aimed at overcoming states' doubts and fears.

Possible entry points and opportunities for enhancing compliance include the following: focusing efforts to address implementation and compliance challenges faced by states; supporting the building of sustainable inter-agency processes to assist implementation; targeting Voluntary Trust Fund (VTF) and other donor funding to strengthen the capacity of key national sectors in arms transfer decision-making, monitoring, and enforcement; building partnerships with other stakeholders, including industry and research institutions; and funding and supporting engagement and partnerships with civil society organizations (CSOs), including those working on gender mainstreaming.

## Key findings

- Only 11 Indo-Pacific countries are currently states parties to the ATT, including countries that supported the adoption of the Treaty and ratified it as soon as it entered into force, and some of the most recent states parties to the Treaty, such as China. Additionally, nine states from the region have signed the Treaty, but not yet ratified it.
- Arms trade realities vary enormously in the Indo-Pacific region, with some states, including ATT states parties, being major global producers and exporters of conventional arms, and others being primarily importers or being involved in very small volumes of trade.
- Illicit firearms trafficking, although limited, can be destabilizing for security, with South-east Asia and South Asia being the most affected subregions.
- With a few exceptions, Oceania features low levels of armed violence and very limited involvement in the arms trade, but limited capacity and lower perceptions of threat have affected levels of engagement with the ATT.
- South-east Asia, an area of considerable strategic and geopolitical significance, has only one state party to the ATT (the Philippines). While the subregion hosts some regional arms control initiatives, limited regional leadership and awareness of the advantages of ATT membership are challenges to greater ATT universalization.
- In East Asia, three states parties (China, Japan, and South Korea) are major arms producers and exporters that are also active within the ATT framework; North Korea continues, despite UN Security Council (UNSC) sanctions, to be a major player in the illicit arms trade.
- With only one state party in the South Asia subregion (the Maldives) and a range of considerable security concerns, there is scant momentum towards greater involvement with the ATT, with limited capacity also being a factor.
- Key challenges to greater engagement with the ATT and compliance with its provisions include the following: domestic reservations and scepticism; limited appreciation of the benefits of the ATT, and little momentum towards ratification and accession; bureaucratic, financial, or capacity hurdles; competing national priorities; and regional security concerns and political influences.

# Policy observations

This section outlines potential entry points and opportunities to address challenges to ATT universalization and compliance in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>1</sup>

## Universalization

1. In line with the Working Group on Treaty Universalization (WGTU) strategy, actors engaged in ATT universalization efforts (such as the WGTU, the ATT Secretariat, national agencies, regional organizations where active, and CSOs) should concentrate efforts on states that have demonstrated a preliminary willingness to join the Treaty. Efforts should include:
  - an assessment of the obstacles to ratification or accession;
  - support to conduct a national self-assessment of national laws and the state's level of compliance with the ATT;
  - a gap analysis at the national level;
  - a national roadmap or strategy towards ATT ratification or accession;
  - updated guidelines and materials on the ATT;
  - activities to re-establish or reinforce momentum; and
  - the development of (particularly for exporting states parties from the region) parallel, targeted strategies to engage non-states parties.
2. Donors and states parties, especially exporting states, should support efforts to establish a stronger evidence base for the security challenges faced by states, and develop strategies for addressing these.
  - Donors should provide specific funding to CSOs, research institutes, and national law enforcement authorities to monitor illicit arms flows.
  - States parties, especially exporting states, should engage more in Working Group meetings and other fora to demonstrate to reluctant importing states the possible benefits of ATT membership.
  - Donors can support and sponsor:
    - efforts to analyse and understand national and subregional realities; and
    - tailored packages in relevant languages, targeting ministries of defence or other actors, that can include experiences from military or defence colleagues from other states.
3. Deepen understanding of the dimensions that characterize the arms trade in the region, particularly maritime and brokering aspects.

- The Working Group on Effective Treaty Implementation (WGETI) session on brokering should seek participation from states still outside the Treaty and include contributions from experts who are able to share ideas and propose effective solutions that have been and could be implemented within the framework of the ATT.
  - Donors could support the design and implementation of dedicated courses that could be led by different national experts from countries that have developed good practices for the effective regulation of arms brokering. These courses could also draw on the involvement of law enforcement officials and authorities at the national and subregional level.
4. Actors engaged in ATT universalization efforts (such as the WGTU, the ATT Secretariat, national agencies, regional organizations where active, and CSOs) should promote inter-agency cooperation from the outset of national considerations of the ATT through Treaty implementation processes.
    - Universalization activities should continue to include meetings and activities that target different national actors.
    - National CSOs can create memos for different ministries highlighting the potential benefits of the Treaty for each of them.
    - Donors can support activities to enable states to develop a joint roadmap towards the Treaty, led by a coordinating agency with the involvement of all relevant national agencies and stakeholders, including CSOs.
  5. The WGETI and actors implementing outreach activities should continue to share the experiences of states that are fully part of the ATT to increase understanding of how to overcome challenges to universalization and compliance.
    - Outreach activities should continue to include lessons learned from other countries and to involve different actors such as port and customs authorities.
    - Implementers can continue to share, during side events, the experiences of states that have received assistance.
    - The new WGETI Sub-working Group on Exchange of National Implementation Practices should continue to enable such exchanges and seek participation from signatory states and non-states parties.
    - The ATT Secretariat should share states' presentations in the WGETI Sub-working Group on Exchange of National Implementation Practices in advance of the meetings, and create a repository of state experiences on the ATT website.
  6. Donors and actors engaged in ATT universalization efforts (such as the WGTU, the ATT Secretariat, national agencies, and regional organizations where active) should foster subregional processes aimed at overcoming states' doubts and fears.



- Donors should support and promote subregional processes, where existing, to increase momentum towards Treaty ratification or accession and compliance.
- States parties should include the ATT in international, regional, subregional, and national conversations about other arms control instruments.

## Compliance

1. States parties and other ATT stakeholders should focus efforts on those states that face challenges in meeting Treaty implementation obligations.
  - CSOs could continue to develop specific activities, such as workshops and clinics, in the margins of ATT fora to focus on ways to overcome particular national challenges to implementation, such as reporting and the establishment of national control systems.
  - States should develop a roadmap for implementation to allow them to measure the extent to which they are meeting their Treaty obligations and to articulate the kind of assistance they might require.
  - The WGETI should consider identifying and using ‘regional champions’ to support individual governments’ implementation challenges.
2. States parties and other ATT stakeholders should focus in particular on inter-agency mechanisms.
  - States should promote an active and constant exchange of information among different agencies at the national level.
  - States parties and CSOs can highlight the synergies of the ATT with other arms control instruments.
  - Regional organizations can support ATT implementation as part of regional approaches.
  - Donors, CSOs, and other actors supporting ATT implementation can link the ATT to other, more pressing, priorities of a state.
  - During Conferences of States Parties, working group meetings, and outreach activities, states can share lessons for improving inter-agency cooperation.
  - States can develop and streamline processes to collect and share information and further engage industry stakeholders.
  - States can develop a permanent inter-agency mechanism at the national level for national implementation monitoring and actions for interacting with national point(s) of contact.
3. Donors should continue to support capacity building for key national sectors responsible for arms transfer decisions, monitoring, and enforcement.

- Donors should focus in particular on the development of sustainable mechanisms to support these sectors.
  - Donors should continue to target VTF and other funding for specific compliance areas such as for technical support, the building of institutions, and the analysis of gaps in legal frameworks.
4. States, donors, and other ATT stakeholders should recognize, encourage, and support contributions by CSOs and parliamentarians in overcoming challenges to various aspects of state engagement with the ATT, including compliance.
- Donors should regularly fund CSOs from the region to allow them to design projects that are targeted to a specific context.
  - Implementers of outreach activities should include and involve national or regional CSOs to ensure continuity in national efforts and dialogue.
  - Donors should financially support CSOs and their numerous advocacy and oversight activities.
  - CSOs and parliamentarians should collaborate to ensure support to parliamentarians in their oversight and enabling roles.
  - The WGETI and exporters should engage more on ensuring that the ATT effectively prevents gender-based violence and violence against women and children in order to earn buy-in and support from CSOs working on gender equality in the areas of universalization and compliance.
5. States should foster and maintain a broader group of civil stakeholders and interlocutors, including industry.
- States should maintain an active dialogue with industry and the private sector to devise effective measures and good practices in support of ATT compliance and responsible international arms transfers.
  - States can engage with institutes, think tanks, and research organizations working on security, defence, and arms control to facilitate dialogue with hesitant national stakeholders, receive advice on the Treaty, and tap into their expertise on specific topics related to national implementation.

“Only 11 Indo-Pacific countries are currently states parties to the ATT. Additionally, nine states from the region have signed the Treaty, but not yet ratified it.”

## Introduction

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The vast and diverse Indo-Pacific region presents an array of interlinked security challenges.<sup>2</sup> These include identity-based conflicts, potential internal instability in different countries in the region, transnational organized crime activities, and the need to enforce UNSC sanctions against North Korea. These security challenges are combined with increasing geopolitical tensions, diverging interests, and competition among regional and global players, including tensions between India and Pakistan, growing distrust between China and the United States and its regional partners, competing claims in the South China Sea, conflict in Myanmar, and potential escalations of hostilities in the Korean Peninsula. Regional insecurity and local and regional extremist movements also have the capacity to threaten a fragile security situation.

The Indo-Pacific region is thus a critical geostrategic region of the world for major power dynamics. Given this regional reality and the numerous causes of potential instability, arms production and arms transfers have become increasingly important for countries and economies in the region (Dellerba et al., 2024). The region hosts major manufacturers and exporters of conventional arms such as China, which is consistently among the top five global arms exporters according to data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and, within the region, exports mostly to Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Thailand (Wezeman, P.D. et al., 2024). Furthermore, SIPRI data indicates that ‘Asia and Oceania’ have been the principal arms importing regions of the world for several decades.<sup>3</sup> A total of 37 per cent of the global volume of imports of arms went to the region between 2019 and 2023, and six of the ten largest arms importers in the world are located in the Indo-Pacific region: India, Pakistan, Japan, Australia, South Korea, and China (Wezeman, P.D. et al., 2024). The region is also key for other aspects related to the international trade of arms, as it hosts important transit and trans-shipment hubs, and brokering activities.

Against this backdrop, only 11 Indo-Pacific countries are currently states parties to the ATT.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, nine states from the region have signed the Treaty, but not yet ratified it (see Map 1).<sup>5</sup> The ATT was adopted in 2013 and entered into force on 24 December 2014. It constitutes the first legally binding international agreement to ‘establish the highest possible common international standards for regulating or improving the regulation of the international trade in conventional arms and prevent and eradicate the illicit trade in conventional arms and prevent their diversion’ (UNGA, 2013, art. 1). The Treaty seeks to regulate different activities related to the international trade of arms, including export, import, transit, trans-shipment, and brokering—referred to as ‘transfer’ (art. 2(2)), which are also relevant to the Indo-Pacific region.

Attitudes towards the Treaty differ across the Indo-Pacific region. Australia and Japan are two of the seven countries that sponsored the first UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution on an arms trade treaty in 2006 (UNGA, 2006; Woolcott, 2014). The region also includes countries such as New Zealand and Samoa, which became states parties

as soon as the Treaty entered into force in December 2014, and some of the most recent states parties to the Treaty such as the Philippines (2022), Niue (2020), China (2020), Maldives (2019), and Palau (2019). Some states from the region such as Bangladesh, Cambodia, Kiribati, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nauru, Singapore, Thailand, and Vanuatu have demonstrated their commitment to the ATT by signing it, but have not yet ratified it (ATT Secretariat, 2024c). Other states remain outside the ATT and some have not demonstrated an interest in joining it; as a result, the region maintains one of the lowest levels of uptake and membership of the Treaty in the world.

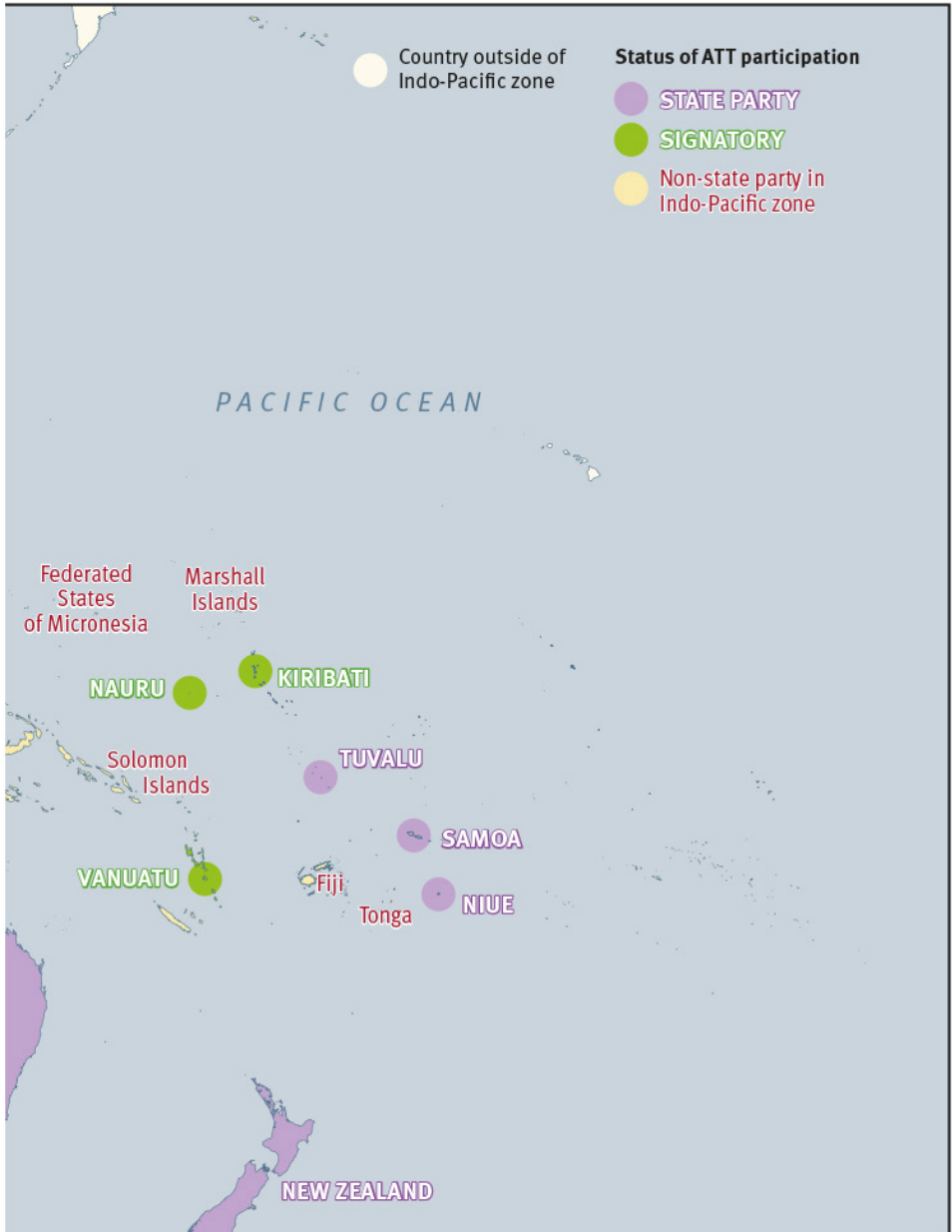
Different actors, including the ATT Secretariat, co-chairs of the WGTU, regional organizations such as the UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific (UNRCPD), the German Federal Office for Economic Affairs and Export Control (BAFA), and Expertise France, and CSOs, have conducted a range of assistance and outreach activities and efforts to promote and increase universalization, implementation, and compliance<sup>6</sup> with the Treaty in the Indo-Pacific region. While it is difficult to firmly establish a causal link between these activities and subsequent ratification or accession, and despite a few Indo-Pacific countries having recently joined the Treaty, ATT membership in the region has seen little change. This would suggest that a more refined understanding of the main obstacles to Treaty universalization and compliance in the Indo-Pacific region could provide an improved foundation for identifying and designing future engagement strategies with the states in the region. This understanding is even more timely as, at the time of writing, the WGTU was discussing a new work plan to enhance its ATT universalization efforts (ATT Secretariat, 2024g).

This Report identifies and analyses factors behind the low uptake of the ATT in the Indo-Pacific region, with the aim of informing efforts by states and other stakeholders in the region to move towards membership of the Treaty and to strengthen national implementation processes. The Report begins with a description of the methodology, before providing an overview of the licit and illicit trade of conventional arms in the Indo-Pacific region. It then explores the main attitudes towards the ATT in the region, breaking it down into four subregions: Oceania, South-east Asia, East Asia, and South Asia. The Report goes on to summarize the main challenges and issues related to ATT universalization and compliance in the Indo-Pacific region. It identifies possible entry points and opportunities for different ATT stakeholders to advance ATT universalization and implementation and to increase alignment on the usefulness of the ATT as a vehicle for arms control in the region. Among these entry points, the Report also investigates the role that CSOs, including those working on gender equality,<sup>7</sup> can have in advancing ATT universalization and compliance in the region. Finally, the last section summarizes the main conclusions of the Report. ●

**Map 1** Membership of the ATT in the Indo-Pacific region



Source: ATT Secretariat (2024c)







“The authors engaged with both government representatives and civil society organizations in the region.”

## Methodology

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This Report is the main written output of the Small Arms Survey’s project ‘Understanding Challenges to ATT Universalization and Compliance in the Indo-Pacific Region’, funded by the Government of Canada. It is based on three primary research vectors:

**Desk research and project activities:** As part of the project, the authors and project team members reviewed a range of studies and documents related to ATT universalization and compliance, both within the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. In addition, the authors engaged with both government representatives and CSOs in the region, during ATT Working Group meetings and on other occasions. For example, in January 2024, the authors attended the ‘Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Fourth Review Conference on the Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons – Asia-Pacific’ in Nepal, where they participated in informal sessions with state representatives from the region. This and other activities offered a more nuanced understanding of challenges to ATT universalization and compliance in the Indo-Pacific region.

**Open-source information:** Data gathered from different open sources, including the UN Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA), the UN Commodity Trade Statistics Database (UN Comtrade), SIPRI databases, UN Panel of Experts reports, and reports on illicit trafficking of weapons complemented the literature review, which formed the foundation of the Report’s overview of licit and illicit trade in the region. The authors also mapped some key indicators in the region, including:

- membership of arms control and disarmament instruments, including the ATT, among states in the Indo-Pacific region;
- votes at the UNGA (2019–23) in support of the ATT;
- assistance and outreach activities conducted in the region;<sup>8</sup>
- projects related to ATT universalization and compliance in the region;<sup>9</sup>
- efforts by CSOs in support of universalization and implementation of the ATT; and
- support provided to states in the region through the ATT Sponsorship Programme.

**Interviews:** In addition, the Small Arms Survey conducted a series of KIIs with 38 people involved in universalization, compliance, and implementation of the ATT.<sup>10</sup> The interviews were semi-structured, as this format allowed for more participation and flexibility, and the possibility to explore issues that emerged from the conversations in more depth.

In addition, the Report is enriched by contributions from two research partners based in the Indo-Pacific region: the Centre for Armed Violence Reduction (CAVR) and Non-violence International Southeast Asia (NISEA). Both partners conducted additional KIIs and research that yielded two background papers used in the drafting of this Report (CAVR, 2024; NISEA, 2024). The organizations both have numerous years of

experience working on topics related to ATT universalization and compliance; extensive knowledge of national legislation and national and regional conventional arms controls initiatives; and a wide network of government, official, and non-governmental contacts in their respective subregions. Their participation in the study highlights the importance of deep local and contextual knowledge and helped overcome the possibility of officials in the region being hesitant or reluctant to talk about potentially sensitive topics with international or external experts. UNRCPD in Kathmandu, with its mandate for the entire region, graciously facilitated meetings with different stakeholders in the region that were helpful in informing this Report.

One challenging aspect of the research underlying this Report was information and engagement on gender-related aspects of the ATT. Previous research carried out by the Small Arms Survey in the region, including as part of the ‘Women, Peace, and Security’ project and firearm-related opinion surveys, had demonstrated a low rate of participation in surveys and questionnaires. To overcome the limited engagement with more general survey techniques, the authors relied on semi-structured interviews, as noted above. The involvement of knowledgeable experts and organizations, including CSOs working on gender equality, in the interviews helped to ensure focus and engagement. The research was further supported by work carried out by CAVR and NISEA.<sup>11</sup> ●



“The production, export, and import capabilities of the countries in the region vary enormously. Similarly, the landscape of the illicit trade is heavily influenced by the region’s diversity.”

## Arms trade in the Indo-Pacific region

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The object of the ATT is to ‘establish the highest possible common international standards for regulating or improving the regulation of the international trade in conventional arms’ and to ‘prevent and eradicate the illicit trade in conventional arms and prevent their diversion’ (UNGA, 2013, art. 1). Using a variety of data sources, this section aims to describe conventional arms production in the region and to provide an overview of imports into the region and exports from states in the region to states both within and outside the Indo-Pacific region. The section begins by examining licit trade, focusing on production, exports, and imports. It then turns to illicit trade, focusing on illicit flows and armed actors in the region, arms embargoes, and craft manufacture. Strategic considerations, the economic realities of the arms trade, and production capabilities, as well as illicit arms and their use, might also influence states’ attitudes towards the ATT, which will be presented in detail in the next section.

The arms trade dimension of the Indo-Pacific region is multifaceted. The region hosts arms producers and exporters—including two of the largest exporters and ATT states parties, China and South Korea—some of the largest importing countries such as India, and transit and trans-shipment hubs, such as Singapore (PSA Singapore, n.d.) and Hong Kong (HKMH, n.d.). The region also hosts 14 of the 20 largest container ports in the world—with seven of the main 10 ports located in China (CERL, 2023)—as well as numerous Pacific Island states. As such, key aspects of arms transfers regulated by the ATT, such as export, import, transit, trans-shipment, and brokering, are relevant to states in the Indo-Pacific region (UNGA, 2013, art. 2(2), 5-10). In the military and security domain, there are challenges and increasing geopolitical tensions, including conflicts, border tensions, internal uprisings, separatist movements, and the presence of non-state armed actors and terrorist groups. Not only are such tensions fuelled by illicit arms, but they may also have influenced the continuous growth in military expenditure since the late 1980s (Tian et al., 2024) and the region’s position as largest importer in the world.<sup>12</sup>

## Licit trade

Licit trade across the Indo-Pacific region represents a variety of different realities. The export and import capabilities of the countries in the region vary enormously, as it hosts some of the largest producers and exporters of weapons in the world as well as some states with very little or no arms production, exports, or imports. Within the region, the largest exporters of conventional arms are China, South Korea, and Australia, followed by India and Thailand. The largest importers of conventional arms are India and Pakistan, followed by China, South Korea, and Australia. For small arms and ammunition, the production is more diversified, with more nations in the region involved in the trade (import and export).<sup>13</sup>

This subsection presents data on production, exports, and imports of conventional arms in the Indo-Pacific region. Conducting a comprehensive overview of licit trade in any region presents some methodological difficulties and limitations, however. Data is often difficult to access or incomplete. This is particularly true for the Indo-Pacific region, which is characterized by a low number of states parties to the ATT and public ATT annual reports, and limited participation in transparency instruments such as UNROCA.

Production is assessed through the SIPRI Arms Industry Database and a review of the literature on the topic. Imports and exports of arms in the region are captured through four different sources of data—ATT annual reports, UNROCA submissions, the SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, and UN Comtrade<sup>14</sup>—in order to completely capture the trade in all categories of conventional arms covered by the ATT; however, using different data sources poses challenges vis-à-vis their different scopes and coverage.

**ATT annual reports** provide only a limited picture of transfers for two reasons: first, only 11 states of the region are states parties to the ATT; and second, ATT states parties can opt to not make their annual reports publicly available (see Table 1). Nine out of the 11 ATT states parties from the region (Australia, China, Japan, Maldives, New

**Table 1** Submissions of annual reports by ATT states parties in the Indo-Pacific region (as of 31 July 2024)

| State party | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|-------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Australia   | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    |
| China       |      |      |      |      |      |      | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    |
| Japan       | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    |
| Maldives    |      |      |      |      | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    | ★    |
| New Zealand | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    |
| Niue        |      |      |      |      |      |      | ★    | ★    | ★    |
| Palau       |      |      |      |      |      | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    | ★    |
| Philippines |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | ★    |
| Samoa       | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    | ★    | ★    | ★    | ★    | ★    |
| South Korea |      |      |      | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    | ✓    |
| Tuvalu      |      | ★    | ✓    | ✓    | ★    | ★    | ★    | ★    | ★    |

Note: Entries in red refer to annual reports that are not publicly available. Entries in blue refer to annual reports that were submitted but not required. ★ = not submitted.

Source: ATT Secretariat (n.d.)

Zealand, Palau, Samoa, South Korea, and Tuvalu) submitted annual reports in the period 2017–23. All annual reports from Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea, as well as some reports from Palau, Samoa, and Tuvalu, are publicly available. The annual reports of China and most annual reports of the Maldives have been submitted with restricted access.

**UNROCA** covers all categories of conventional arms of the ATT.<sup>15</sup> For the years 2017–23, only 11 countries from the region have submitted reports on conventional arms (excluding small arms and light weapons) to UNROCA.<sup>16</sup> This corresponds with a general decline in submissions to UNROCA (Holtom, Mensah, and Nicolin, 2022). It is important to note that UNROCA includes reports submitted by exporters and importers, so additional data could be obtained in some cases by looking at the reports of the trading partners; however, since countries self-report their imports and exports to UNROCA, the data disproportionately represents countries with more transparent and regular reporting practices (both their own and that of their trading partners).

The **SIPRI Arms Transfers Database** is based on open sources and covers exports and imports of ‘major arms’, which includes different categories of conventional arms. It does not, however, cover small arms and light weapons, except for man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS) and guided anti-tank missiles.<sup>17</sup>

**UN Comtrade** relies on a self-reporting mechanism by customs based on a classification in Harmonized System (HS) codes.<sup>18</sup> The HS categories for conventional arms of UN Comtrade, however, do not correspond with the categories of conventional arms covered by the ATT, except for small arms (Jenzen-Jones and Schroeder, 2018). Hence, in this Report, UN Comtrade is used only to measure the trade in small arms. In addition, even relying only on HS codes of small arms, light weapons, and ammunition, there is a significant potential for error due to misclassification of products by customs authorities, mismatches between reporting from exporters and importers, and the fact that some HS categories are ‘catch all’ codes covering a wide array of products (Jenzen-Jones and Schroeder, 2018).

As a result, numbers in the different data sets often do not match, and a cross-comparison of export and import data between these different databases is therefore not feasible. Nonetheless, the data presented can help understand and assess broad export and import trends in the Indo-Pacific region and can be used to establish a general overview of the licit trade of arms in the region.

## Production

The Indo-Pacific region hosts some major producers of conventional arms. Although most countries in the Indo-Pacific remain dependent on arms imports (see subsection on imports), there is a strong desire among some countries to increase domestic



production to achieve self-reliance, given the volatile security environment of the region (Béraud-Sudreau et al., 2022).

## Production of conventional arms

In 2022, 22 out of the top 100 arms-producing and military companies were based in Asia and Oceania (Liang et al., 2023)—with eight in mainland China, four in Japan, four in South Korea, and three in India, and one each in Australia, Singapore, and Taiwan, China.<sup>19</sup> Notably, of the eight companies in mainland China, three (Norinco, the Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC), and the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC)) were included in the top ten arms-producing and military services companies, and their combined revenue represented 18 per cent of the total revenue of the top 100 companies globally. The total revenue of the 22 companies from Asia and Oceania is estimated to amount to USD 134 billion, an increase of 3.1 per cent from 2021. For comparison, the top 26 arms-producing companies of Europe experienced an increase of only 0.9 per cent and had a total revenue of USD 121 billion. The year 2022 marked the second year in a row when the revenue of arms-producing companies of Asia and Oceania surpassed those of Europe (Liang et al., 2023).

A SIPRI study assessing production capabilities in 12 countries and economies of the region concludes that these countries and economies are at various stages of self-reliance (Béraud-Sudreau et al., 2022).<sup>20</sup> East Asian states such as China, Japan, and South Korea are more self-reliant than states in South-east Asia, with China being the only country able to ‘produce complex weapon systems in all sectors’ (p. 43). Other countries such as Australia and Singapore have developed advanced production in distinct ‘niche’ sectors. The study also notes that India and Pakistan have ‘large and broad-based arms industries’, while Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam are focused on ‘low-tech’ solutions, including the maintenance, repair, and overhaul of foreign systems (pp. 43, 46). The study offers further evidence of the range of production capabilities across the region.

## Production of small arms

The Indo-Pacific region also hosts numerous companies manufacturing small arms. Although firm data on small arms production is sometimes hard to obtain, the literature and expert interviews conducted in the framework of this Report indicate that small arms are produced throughout the region.<sup>21</sup>

Small arms production occurs in several countries and economies in the region—including Australia; China; India; Indonesia; Japan; Malaysia; Myanmar; Pakistan; New Zealand; North Korea; the Philippines; Singapore; South Korea; Taiwan, China; Thailand; and Vietnam.<sup>22</sup> Some countries, such as China, are major producers of small

arms and ammunition and export them at a global level (Chopra, 2020; Mariani, 2021). Others such as the Philippines produce small arms principally for the domestic market and export mostly to the region. A study conducted by the Small Arms Survey in 2019 showed that in some countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam production centred around indigenized variants of weapons and production licensed from other countries (Picard, Holtom, and Mangan, 2019). For instance, the Z111 factory, Vietnam's main production site, produced mainly Soviet/Russian Federation and Israeli small arms under licence, including assault and sniper rifles, sub-machine guns, heavy machine guns, automatic grenade launchers, and handguns (Picard, Holtom, and Mangan, 2019). Thailand also produced Tavor-Tar 21 assault rifles and Negev light machine guns under licence from Israel (Holtom and Parker, 2016).

Historically, small arms were produced in the region under licence from countries such as Belgium, Israel, Norway, the Russian Federation, the former Soviet Union, or the United States (Picard, Holtom, and Mangan, 2019; Holtom and Parker, 2016). Some countries from the region also licensed their own small arms production to third countries in the Indo-Pacific region: for instance, Singapore licensed the production of CIS 50MG 50 mm (SMB-QCB in Indonesia) heavy machine guns to Indonesia (Stanley-Lockman, 2019); South Korea licensed part of its production to the Philippines (Holtom and Parker, 2016); and China licensed production of small arms to different countries in the region (Chopra, 2020; Holtom and Parker, 2016).

The 2019 study also focused on small arms production trends in 11 countries of South-east Asia: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam (Picard, Holtom and Mangan, 2019). The study distinguished between state-owned or -controlled production facilities and private manufacturers. At that time, most of the production in South-east Asia was supposed to cater to the defence needs of the states. The notable exception was the Philippines, which had a considerable civilian industry—with 15 licensed private manufacturers in the country, although the majority of these were subcontractors for larger local firms. Their most frequently produced products were handguns and ammunition. Several of these manufacturers also exported their production, which might explain the Philippines' current position as one of the top small arms exporters of the region. On a smaller scale, some private manufacturers have also been established in Indonesia and Malaysia.

Alongside large companies, the region also hosts numerous smaller manufacturers of small arms. A detailed mapping of small arms manufacturers in the region would be a monumental and extremely difficult task: a country such as Pakistan, for instance, has an extensive state-owned small arms production capacity (Pakistan Ordnance Factories) (Pakistan, n.d.), as well as an array of smaller workshops, as the subsection on craft production below will show (Islam and Shah, 2019).

## Exports

This subsection presents data on exports of conventional arms in the Indo-Pacific region for the period 2017–23,<sup>23</sup> by units. Table 2 provides an overview of the ten main exporters of both conventional arms and small arms and light weapons, ranked by source.

### ATT annual reports (conventional arms)

Data available through the ATT annual reports remains very limited due to the low number of states parties in the region. Australia reported having exported 848 units

**Table 2** Main exporters of conventional arms in the region, ranked by source

| Conventional arms exports (excluding small arms and light weapons) | UNROCA      | SIPRI         | Small arms and light weapons exports | UNROCA      | UN Comtrade (reported by exporters) | UN Comtrade (reported by importers) |
|--|-------------|---------------|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1  | South Korea | China         | 1                                    | South Korea | Philippines                         | China                               |
| 2  | China       | South Korea   | 2                                    | Australia   | China                               | India                               |
| 3  | Australia   | Australia     | 3                                    | China       | Japan                               | South Korea                         |
| 4  | Malaysia    | Pakistan      | 4                                    | Japan       | India                               | Japan                               |
| 5  | India       | India         | 5                                    | Singapore   | Australia                           | Philippines                         |
| 6  | Singapore   | Thailand      | 6                                    | New Zealand | New Zealand                         | Australia                           |
| 7  | Thailand    | New Zealand   | 7                                    | Pakistan    | South Korea                         | Pakistan                            |
| 8  | New Zealand | Singapore     | 8                                    | Philippines | Thailand                            | Singapore                           |
| 9  | No data     | Indonesia     | 9                                    | Malaysia    | Malaysia                            | New Zealand                         |
| 10   | No data     | Taiwan, China | 10                                   | Thailand    | Pakistan                            | Laos                                |

Notes: ATT states parties are marked in red; ATT signatory states are in blue. In line with SIPRI's designation, data for Taiwan, China is recorded separately from data for China.

Sources: SIPRI (n.d.c); UN Comtrade (n.d.); UNROCA (n.d.b)

of conventional arms other than small arms and light weapons, and 26,262 units of small arms from 2017 to 2023. Japan exported 17 conventional arms other than small arms and light weapons, and 760,650 units of small arms, while South Korea exported 584 units of conventional arms other than small arms and light weapons, and 25,206 units of small arms during the same time period. New Zealand reported having exported 13 units of conventional arms other than small arms and light weapons and 3,259 units of small arms. Other states parties from the region reported no exports or did not make their reports public.

### UNROCA (conventional arms)<sup>24</sup>

The data from UNROCA, based on the reports of the few Indo-Pacific states that have regularly reported to UNROCA and on the reports of their trading partners, was only available for 12 countries.<sup>25</sup> It indicates that the five main exporters of conventional arms (excluding small arms and light weapons) in the region are, in decreasing order, South Korea, China, Australia, Malaysia, and India.

In addition, countries report to UNROCA on transfers of small arms.<sup>26</sup> Data on small arms exports was available for 15 countries in the region.<sup>27</sup> Based on UNROCA reporting, the five main exporters of small arms in the Indo-Pacific region are, in decreasing order, South Korea, Australia, China, Japan, and Singapore.

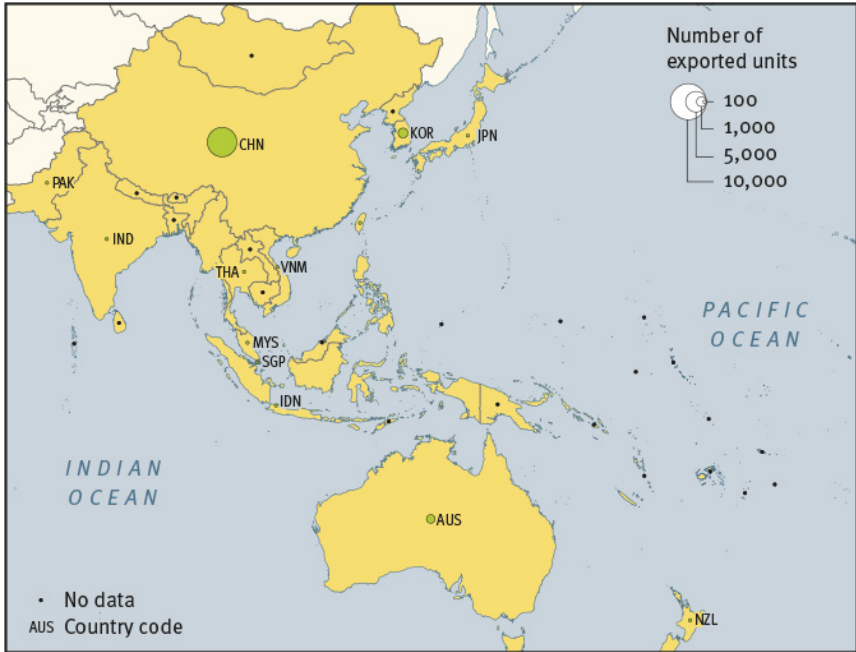
### SIPRI Arms Transfers Database (major arms)

The SIPRI Arms Transfers Database provides information on transfers of major conventional arms from 1950 onwards.<sup>28</sup> It does not include small arms and light weapons, except for MANPADS and anti-tank guided missiles.<sup>29</sup> To allow for a comparison between data on deliveries of different weapons and to identify general trends, SIPRI has developed a unique system to measure the volume of international transfers of major conventional arms using a common unit—the trend-indicator value (TIV) (Holtom, Bromley, and Simmel, 2012). New data, as well as an analysis of trends in international arms transfers, is published annually.<sup>30</sup>

For the purposes of this Report, the authors used the SIPRI Arms Transfers Database to obtain data on exports of major arms by units rather than by using TIVs. This approach allowed for some comparison with other databases used in the Report. Map 2 shows the main exporters of major arms from the region as reflected in the SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.

The data indicates that China, South Korea, and Australia—three ATT states parties—are the largest exporters of major arms from the region. These results are in line with the trends shown by the SIPRI TIV indicator. According to the TIV data, China, South Korea, and Australia are ranked 4<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 16<sup>th</sup>, respectively, among the largest

**Map 2** Exports of major arms from the Indo-Pacific region, 2017–23, as recorded in the SIPRI Arms Transfers Database



Note: In line with SIPRI's designation, data for Taiwan, China is recorded separately from data for China.

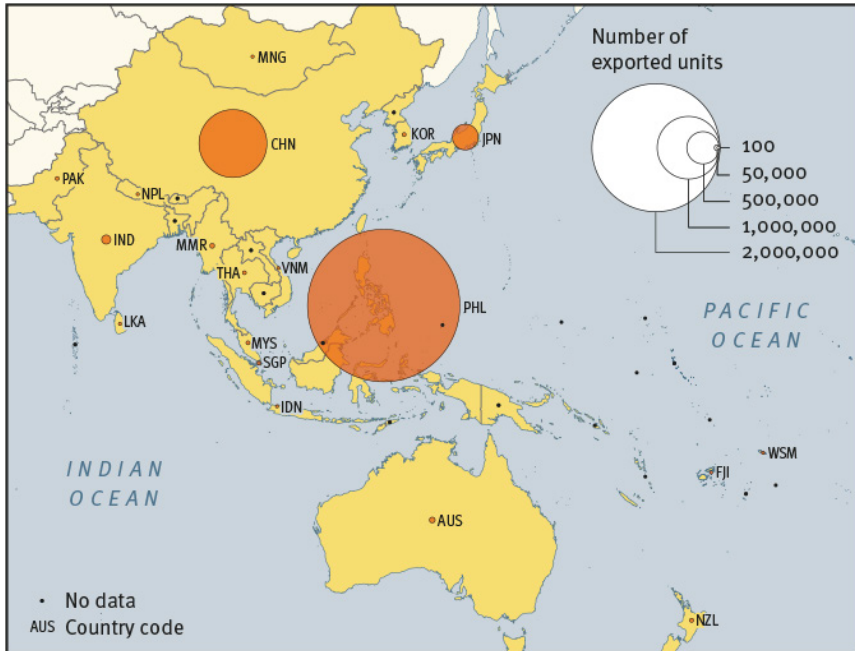
Source: SIPRI (n.d.c)

exporters of major arms in the world. China accounted for a total of 5.8 per cent of all global exports from 2019 to 2023—a decrease of 5.3 per cent from the previous period (2014–18). It is worth noting that 85 per cent of Chinese exports went to states in Asia and Oceania, and that both China and South Korea mainly export to other countries in the region, including Pakistan (61 per cent of total Chinese exports), Bangladesh, Thailand, the Philippines (an ATT state party), and India (Wezeman, P.D. et al., 2024). The SIPRI data is consistent with that of UNROCA on conventional arms. The latter, however, contains more records of transfers from South Korea than from China.

### UN Comtrade database (small arms and related ammunition)

The UN Comtrade database has been used to gather further data and information on exports of small arms.<sup>31</sup> In order to achieve greater accuracy, data provided by exporters has been checked against data provided by importers. Data from exporters and importers is thus presented separately in Maps 3–4.

**Map 3** Exports of small arms and light weapons from the Indo-Pacific region, 2017–23, as reported to UN Comtrade by exporters

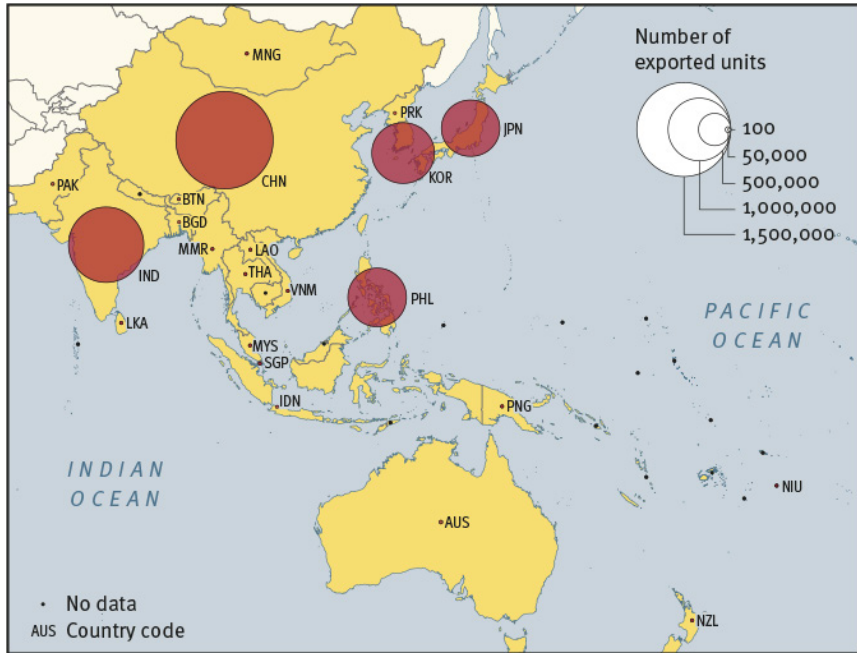


Source: UN Comtrade (n.d.)

Data provided by exporting countries indicates that the main exporters from the region are, in decreasing order, the Philippines, China, Japan, India, and Australia—all ATT states parties, except for India. New Zealand, South Korea, Thailand, and, to a lesser extent, Malaysia, Pakistan, Singapore, and Myanmar have also reported sizeable quantities of exports of small arms. Data from importing countries is not too dissimilar, and identifies China, India, South Korea, Japan, and the Philippines—and, to a lesser extent, Australia, Pakistan, Singapore, New Zealand, and Laos—as the main exporters of small arms between 2017 and 2023.

Data reported from exporters and importers shows significant overlap, providing a good indication of the veracity of the overall trends identified. Four countries appear as main exporters of small arms in both data sets: China, India, Japan, and the Philippines. Other actors in the region, which were identified from both exporters and importers data, are Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, and South Korea. But there are also notable differences between the data provided by importers and the data provided by exporters, for example on the transfers from countries such as India, Pakistan, and South Korea.

**Map 4** Exports of small arms and light weapons from the Indo-Pacific region, 2017–23, as reported to UN Comtrade by importers



Source: UN Comtrade (n.d.)

Measuring international transfers of ammunition is an extremely difficult task. Data on ammunition for conventional weapons is not available from either UNROCA or SIPRI. The UN Comtrade database includes data on the trade of ammunition, but clear HS codes are only available for certain types of small arms ammunition—930621 (shotgun cartridges and parts thereof), and 930630 (other cartridges and parts thereof)—which were used in this case.<sup>32</sup> Data from exporting states indicates that the biggest exporters of small arms ammunition in 2017–23 were, in descending order, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Singapore, and India.<sup>33</sup> Data reported by importers suggests that China, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, and India were the largest exporters. ATT states parties thus represented a significant proportion of the main exporters of small arms ammunition. The data on small arms ammunition exports—particularly those reported by exporters—seems to indicate more participation in the export of ammunition by East and South-east Asian countries. Since UN Comtrade is unfortunately the only database to measure ammunition flows extensively across countries, corroborating this data is not possible.

## Imports

This subsection presents data on imports of conventional arms in the Indo-Pacific region for the period 2017–23<sup>34</sup> by units, using the same sources as the preceding section on exports. Table 3 provides an overview of the ten main importers of both conventional arms and small arms and light weapons, ranked by source.

### ATT Annual Reports (conventional arms)

Data on imports available through the ATT annual reports was limited. Japan reported having imported 82 conventional arms other than small arms and light weapons, and 27,564 small arms between 2017 and 2023. During the same period, South Korea

**Table 3** Main importers of conventional arms in the region, ranked by source

| Conventional arms imports (excluding small arms and light weapons) | UNROCA      | SIPRI       | Small arms and light weapons imports | UNROCA      | Comtrade (reported by importers) | Comtrade (reported by exporters) |
|--|-------------|-------------|--------------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1  | India       | India       | 1                                    | Thailand    | Philippines                      | Thailand                         |
| 2  | Pakistan    | Pakistan    | 2                                    | Australia   | Thailand                         | Australia                        |
| 3  | Bangladesh  | South Korea | 3                                    | Philippines | South Korea                      | Philippines                      |
| 4  | Australia   | Australia   | 4                                    | New Zealand | Australia                        | New Zealand                      |
| 5  | China       | Singapore   | 5                                    | Pakistan    | Indonesia                        | Pakistan                         |
| 6  | South Korea | Thailand    | 6                                    | India       | Pakistan                         | Bangladesh                       |
| 7  | Thailand    | Indonesia   | 7                                    | Malaysia    | New Zealand                      | Indonesia                        |
| 8  | Indonesia   | China       | 8                                    | Indonesia   | Malaysia                         | South Korea                      |
| 9  | Vietnam     | Japan       | 9                                    | Nepal       | Japan                            | India                            |
| 10   | Cambodia    | Bangladesh  | 10                                   | Singapore   | India                            | Singapore                        |

Note: ATT states parties are marked in red; ATT signatory states are in blue.

Sources: SIPRI (n.d.c); UN Comtrade (n.d.); UNROCA (n.d.b)



imported 226 conventional arms other than small arms and light weapons, and 3,535 small arms, while New Zealand imported 22 major arms and 95,030 small arms. Australia reported having imported 838 conventional arms other than small arms and light weapons, and 527,700 small arms. Samoa and Tuvalu each submitted a nil report, and therefore had neither imported nor exported any conventional arms. Other states parties from the region did not make their reports public.

## UNROCA (conventional arms)

Data was not available for the Federated States of Micronesia, Mongolia, Niue, Timor-Leste, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu for imports of conventional arms other than small arms and light weapons, and for Nauru, Niue, North Korea, and Tuvalu for small arms imports. According to data from UNROCA, the main importers of conventional arms (excluding small arms and light weapons) are, in decreasing order, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and three ATT states parties: Australia, China, and South Korea.

Based on UNROCA data, the overall picture of imports of small arms seems to differ from that of imports of conventional arms. The number of importers is larger and more varied, and data indicates, in decreasing order, Thailand, Australia, the Philippines, New Zealand, Pakistan, India, and Malaysia as the main importers in the region.

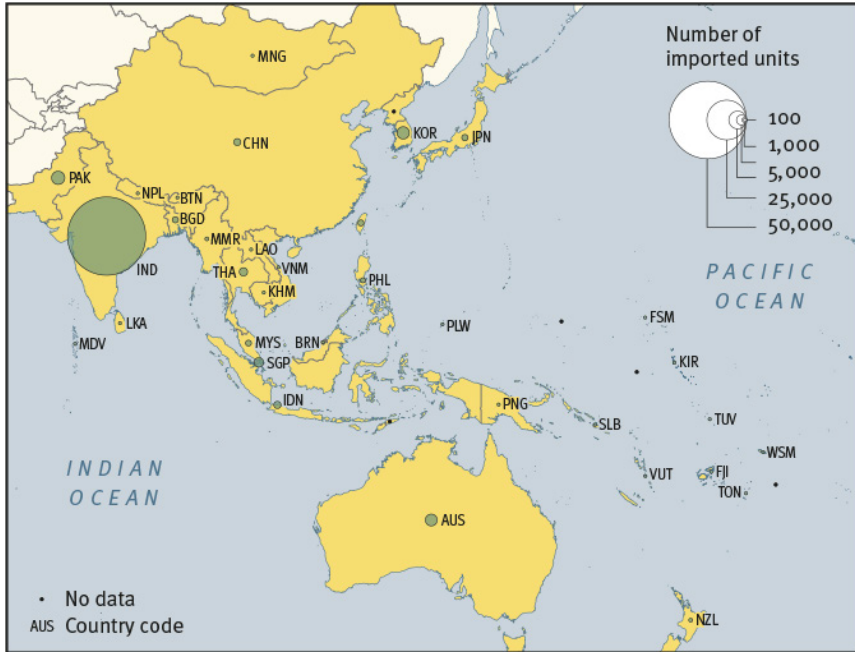
## SIPRI Arms Transfers Database (major arms)

According to the SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, the main importers of major arms by units are, in decreasing order, India, Pakistan, and two ATT states parties: South Korea and Australia. Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, China, and Japan follow these countries (see Map 5).

This ranking is in line with the results obtained both from UNROCA's less comprehensive data on conventional arms imports (excluding small arms and light weapons) and using SIPRI's TIV. Data on volumes of arms imports expressed in TIVs indicates that the region hosts some of the largest importers of major arms, with six countries among the top ten global importers from the SIPRI Arms Transfers Database. India is the world's largest importer of major arms; Pakistan and Japan (an ATT state party) are fifth and sixth, respectively; and three other ATT states parties—Australia, South Korea, and China—are eighth, ninth, and tenth, respectively, in SIPRI's ranking. Other importers such as Singapore (20<sup>th</sup>, 1.5 per cent of global imports), the Philippines (22<sup>nd</sup>, 1 per cent), and Indonesia (23<sup>rd</sup>, 1 per cent) have a slightly lower share of global imports (Wezeman, P.D. et al, 2024).

Asia and Oceania is the region with the highest volume of arms imports. Between 2019 and 2023, it accounted for 37 per cent of global imports of major arms.<sup>35</sup> The region still, however, experienced a decrease in imports of 12 per cent from the previous period (2014–18). This was due to a decrease in arms imports by South-east Asia of

**Map 5** Imports of major arms to the Indo-Pacific region, 2017–23, as recorded in the SIPRI Arms Transfers Database



Note: In line with SIPRI’s designation, data for Taiwan, China is recorded separately from data for China.

Source: SIPRI (n.d.c)

43 per cent (with the exception of an increase in imports by the Philippines and Singapore—both ATT states parties—and a drop in Chinese imports). This decrease was partly compensated by an increase in imports by India, Pakistan, Japan, and South Korea compared to 2014–18. Most of the imports in Oceania are driven by Australia and New Zealand, eighth and 39<sup>th</sup> global importers by volume, respectively. The main suppliers of the region were the United States, Russia, and China (Wezeman, P.D. et al., 2024).

### UN Comtrade database (small arms and related ammunition)

Maps 6–7 present data on small arms imports reported by importers to UN Comtrade, further complemented by data reported by exporters.

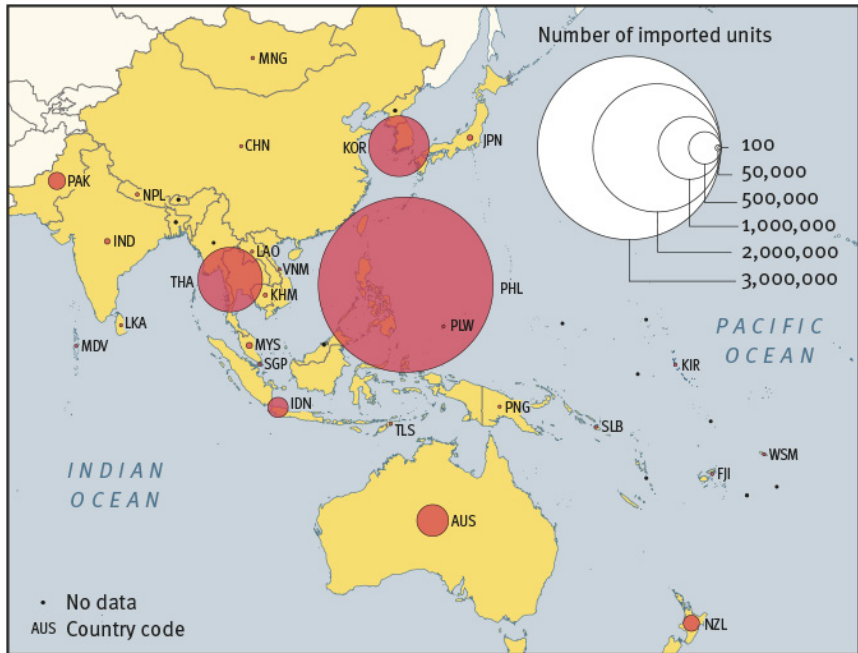
The importers’ reports on UN Comtrade paint a picture not too dissimilar to UNROCA’s data on small arms. The top importers of small arms in the region are, in decreasing order, the Philippines, Thailand, South Korea, Australia, Indonesia, Pakistan, New

Zealand, and Malaysia.<sup>36</sup> Data reported by exporters shows similar patterns to that reported by importers. Exporters report that their main importing partners were Thailand, Australia, the Philippines, New Zealand, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, South Korea, and India.

Data on small arms imports from UNROCA and UN Comtrade shows that South-east Asian countries such as Thailand and the Philippines are among the top importers of small arms in the Indo-Pacific region, and that other countries from the subregion such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore also import significant amounts of small arms. Large Oceanian countries such as Australia and New Zealand are also among the main importers. In South Asia, Pakistan imports the largest amount of small arms.

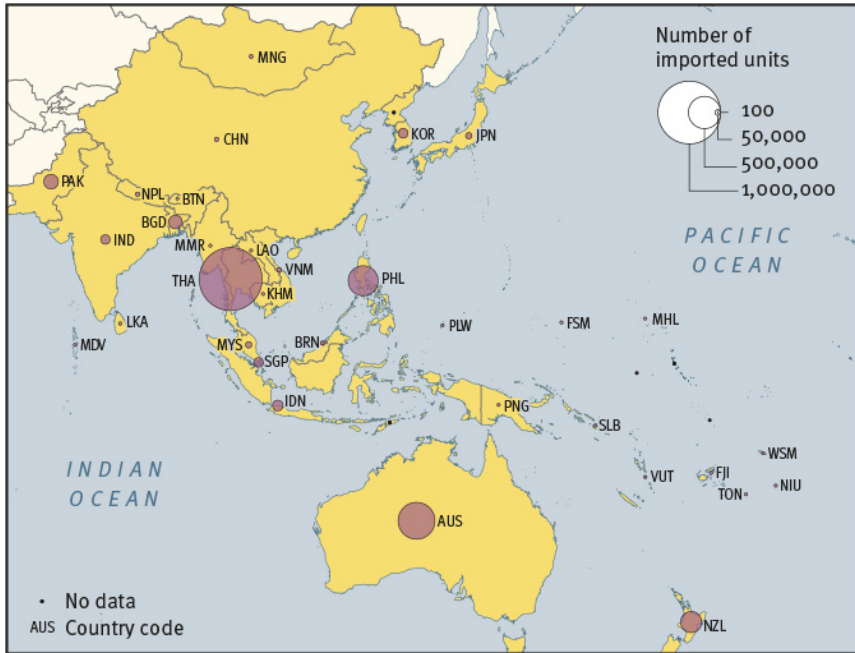
According to the UN Comtrade reports by importing states, the main importers of small arms ammunition are, in decreasing order, Australia, Japan, Thailand, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and South Korea. Exporters' reports reveal a similar picture, with the main importing partners being Australia, Japan, Indonesia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand, South Korea, and India.

**Map 6** Imports of small arms and light weapons to the Indo-Pacific region, 2017–23, as reported to UN Comtrade by importers



Source: UN Comtrade (n.d.)

**Map 7** Imports of small arms and light weapons to the Indo-Pacific region, 2017–23, as reported to UN Comtrade by exporters



Source: UN Comtrade (n.d.)

It is important to note that it is not only substantial volumes of exports and imports that may influence a country’s standing regarding the ATT. The region also hosts important transit and trans-shipment hubs, and brokering activities.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, in some specific Indo-Pacific contexts, even small amounts of diverted, illicit, and mis-used arms can have significant destabilizing effects and serious human impacts.

## Illicit trade

One of the objects of the ATT is to ‘prevent and eradicate the illicit trade in conventional arms and prevent their diversion’ (UNGA, 2013, art. 1). While the scope of the ATT covers all conventional arms, the vast majority of arms that are diverted and become illicit are small arms, due to their widespread availability, affordable price, ease of transport, and concealability. Illicit small arms have been defined as ‘weapons that are produced, transferred, held, or used in violation of national or international law’ (Schroeder, 2012, p. 314)—the definition adopted in this Report.

Data on illicit arms is, by nature, often incomplete and captures only a portion of the total of illicit arms circulating in a given country or region. Providing a complete account of the illicit trade of arms in the Indo-Pacific region is beyond the limitations of this Report. Instead, this subsection canvasses the literature on illicit arms in the region and UN Panel of Experts reports<sup>38</sup> to provide general information on the main features that characterize the illicit arms trade in the Indo-Pacific region. It offers an overview of illicit flows and end users in the region, as well as of specific dimensions such as arms embargoes and craft production.

## Illicit arms flows and end users

Like for the licit trade, the landscape of the illicit trade of arms, particularly firearms,<sup>39</sup> is heavily influenced by the region's diversity in terms of its geography, economics, history, and political developments. The parts of the region that are most affected by illicit firearms proliferation are South-east Asia and South Asia, given their long-standing history of war and intra-state conflict (Hiswi, 2018).

Firearms are, alongside drugs, one of the more trafficked commodities in the region (Dahari, Idris, and Othman, 2019). According to the Global Organized Crime Index, among the countries most affected by firearms trafficking<sup>40</sup> in the region in 2023 are, in decreasing order, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, India, Sri Lanka, Laos, and Bangladesh (Global Organized Crime Index, n.d.b). East Asia and Oceania are not unaffected, however. East Asia has relatively few problems with firearms trafficking: some small-scale trafficking was reported in China, Japan, and South Korea (Global Organized Crime Index, n.d.b). (North Korea is a special case and discussed in detail below.) Oceania has experienced some firearms trafficking, which is most thoroughly documented in Papua New Guinea (PNG) (Watson et al., 2023; Global Organized Crime Index, n.d.b; see Box 2). A small number of trafficking cases has also been reported in Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Samoa, and the Solomon Islands (Global Organized Crime Index, n.d.b; Koorey, 2016).

## Sources of illicit arms

The illicit arms in the region originate from different sources—one of these being the numerous interstate conflicts, wars, and political tensions, which left many countries with a surplus of unaccounted for firearms. For instance, an estimated 150,000 tons of ammunition and 2 million firearms were left as a legacy of the Vietnam war (Buscemi, 2019). Cold war-era conflicts, where ideological partners received weapons and ammunition from their sponsors, contributed to a large surplus in arms and helped establish existing trafficking patterns (Buscemi, 2019; Dahari, Idris, and Othman, 2019). Finally, internal conflicts within states such as Myanmar (Buscemi,

2019), Sri Lanka (Clarke, 2020), Nepal (Subedi and Bhattarai, 2017), Solomon Islands (Hameiri, 2007), and Timor-Leste (Smith, 2020) also fed patterns of diversion and illicit arms acquisition.

The diversion of legal arms into the illicit market occurs frequently in countries such as PNG (Koorey, 2016), the Philippines (Santos and Santos, 2010), Malaysia, and Thailand (Dahari, Idris and Othman, 2019). This is not surprising given the large quantities of weapons produced or traded in the region.

Different factors facilitate diversion and illicit flows of firearms in the region, including the following:

- poorly controlled state-held stockpiles: for instance, in PNG (see Box 2);<sup>41</sup>
- porous borders: for instance, in the land-linked areas in South-east Asia (NISEA, 2024), between Pakistan and Afghanistan (Fleischner, 2023) and between Nepal and India (Paudel, 2014);<sup>42</sup>
- difficulties in overseeing geographical conditions: for instance, in jungles (Bangladesh) or along coastlines (Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines);
- corruption: for instance, officers renting out their firearms to rebels or criminal groups on an ad hoc basis (Bangladesh) (Rana and Nesa, 2018), or selling their guns to third parties (PNG) (Koorey, 2016);
- economic factors: for instance, differences in firearm prices between neighbouring countries, unemployment levels, and the need for extra income (in Malaysia, for example, firearms are difficult and expensive to obtain, which creates incentives for smuggling from neighbouring countries such as Thailand (Dahari, Idris, and Othman, 2019));
- surpluses of arms in neighbouring states that create incentives and opportunities for smugglers: for instance, surpluses of firearms in India and Myanmar transferred to neighbouring Bangladesh (Rana and Nesa, 2018), and surpluses in Australia transferred to PNG (Koorey, 2016); and
- links to other illicit activities, such as the drug trade: for instance, in countries such as India (Gou, 2013), Malaysia (Dahari, Idris and Othman, 2019), and New Zealand (Global Organized Crime Index, n.d.a). In the north-east of India, for example, insurgent groups involved in firearms trafficking reportedly either tax drug traffickers for armed protection of their trafficking routes, or produce drugs themselves (Gou, 2013; Hazarika, 2024).

Arms are most often trafficked by land routes or sea. Rare instances of air trafficking have also been reported (Rana and Nesa, 2018).<sup>43</sup> Notably, the Global Organized Crime Index reported that, in recent years, online platforms and social media have allegedly

been used for illicit transactions in Indonesia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam (Global Organized Crime Index, n.d.b).

Arms brokering—acting as an intermediary to facilitate the sale or transfer of weapons—is a legitimate activity, and ATT states parties take measures to regulate brokering taking place under their jurisdiction (UNGA, 2013, art. 10).<sup>44</sup> There have, however, been some dubious transfers in the region. For instance, a report by the CSO Justice for Myanmar identified 116 companies from Myanmar and Singapore that brokered the supply of weapons worth millions of USD to the military in Myanmar, including after the 2021 coup (Justice for Myanmar, 2022). The report further points out that Singapore has a long-standing history as a trade hub for the Myanmar military junta. Cases of brokering have also been identified in other countries of the region. Notably, in 2008, the well-known Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout was arrested in Thailand (Reuters, 2008). Brokering has reportedly also occurred in New Zealand (Homayun, 2010), Cambodia (Dahari, Idris, and Othman, 2019), Australia (Bright et al., 2022), Bangladesh (Clarke, 2020), and Malaysia (Salisbury, 2019), among others.

### **Box 1** Case study on the diversity of firearms trafficking patterns and end users in the region: Bangladesh

Bangladesh's firearms trafficking patterns are characterized by both its geographical position and its rich diversity of actors. Bangladesh's unique position—being surrounded by neighbouring states with significant firearms trafficking markets, and with a topography that lends itself to clandestine transport (whether by land, through the rainforests, or via the strategically important gulf of Bengal)—is a factor that makes it easy for smuggling to occur. Inefficient border controls and corruption further exacerbate risks of trafficking across borders (Rana and Nesa, 2018).

The main complexity of the trafficking situation in Bangladesh, however, stems from the variety of end users of illicit firearms and their various suppliers. The main end users of illegal firearms in the country are different kinds of non-state armed groups as well as separatist movements, such as the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) insurgents (Rana and Nesa, 2018; IWGIA, 2012). It has been reported that, in some instances, illegal firearms have also been used by some political leaders (*Dhaka Tribune*, 2016). The variety of armed groups present on Bangladeshi territory worsens the cross-border trafficking situation. Most groups are provided with firearms from ideologically affiliated groups in the region. For instance, some Islamist extremists are believed to receive firearms from the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban. Similarly, the Rohingya Solidarity Organization is believed to be supplied by other international jihadist movements (BD News 24, 2005; Rana and Nesa, 2018), while some CHT insurgents have allegedly received firearms from India in the past (Chowdhury, 2006, p. 43; Haider, 2021, p. 210; IWGIA, 2012, p. 14). This situation not only poses a threat to security within the country, but also worsens the cross-border relationship with its neighbours (Rana and Nesa, 2018).

## **Box 2** Case study on the diversity of firearms trafficking patterns and end users in the region: Papua New Guinea

Trafficking in PNG centres around its own citizens (including tribal groups) and their government, rather than cross-border trafficking or the presence of non-state armed groups. The country's supply of firearms largely enters the country legally before being diverted from licensed gun owners and dealers, or from the stockpiles of the military and police (Koorey, 2016; Watson et al., 2023). The demand for firearms is mostly driven by high levels of criminality, and the resulting need for personal and asset protection, for example with private security firms or security at mining sites (Koorey, 2016; Watson et al., 2023).

Factors contributing to the diversion of firearms into the illicit market are mainly the high levels of corruption, the lack of trust in government and security institutions by the citizens (further intensified by an understaffed and underfunded police force,<sup>45</sup> and the resulting cultural expectation to carry guns), systematic failures in dealing with legal gun ownership and registration, and the prohibitive costs of firearms licences (Koorey, 2016). The prevalence of homemade guns, particularly in the highlands of PNG, is also a significant concern. Similarly, tribal fighting plays an important role in the illicit use of firearms on the island (ACLEDD, 2024; Koorey, 2016).

The politicization of firearms trafficking also seems to be a significant problem. In some instances, firearms have allegedly been brought into the country legally by politicians and then distributed among their followers for the intimidation of political opponents, while killings reportedly occurred in the country in the 2012 elections in Southern Highlands (Goro and Sanida, 2023; Koorey, 2016; Ligaiula, 2021). It was also reported that weapons legally imported for the police had been diverted and used against political opponents of various political actors, and weapons confiscated by police were found in the hands of members of parliament and their families (Koorey, 2016).

## End users and traffickers of illicit arms

As described above, the Indo-Pacific region is filled with interstate tensions and intra-state turmoil, both past and present. Non-state armed groups have often received illicit arms, or been involved in arms trafficking themselves (Rana and Nesa, 2018). These groups range from extremists or separatists to tribal fighting groups (see Box 1).<sup>46</sup>

Furthermore, the Global Organized Crime Index highlighted how firearms have been sold and bought by criminal groups and organized crime structures, including in Australia, Indonesia, Japan, and Nepal (Global Organized Crime Index, n.d.b). In some instances, these criminal structures involve ordinary citizens, who are often unemployed or under-employed, such as underpaid fishermen in Kiribati or farmers in Vietnam (Global Organized Crime Index, n.d.b). Arms are also used for political purposes. There have been instances, for example, of political actors arming their supporters for



protection and to intimidate political opponents in countries such as Nepal, PNG, and Sri Lanka (Global Organized Crime Index, n.d.b; Koorey, 2016; see Box 2).

## Arms embargoes

The imposition of a UNSC-mandated arms embargo means that the transfer of items covered under the embargo is illegal under international law. Article 6(1) of the ATT prohibits transfers that violate a state party's 'obligations under measures adopted by the United Nations Security Council acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, in particular arms embargoes' (UNGA, 2013, art. 6).<sup>47</sup>

The experience of states in the Indo-Pacific region with respect to UNSC-imposed arms embargoes provides an additional lens onto the nature of the illicit trade in the region. Of particular importance in this respect is the case of North Korea, the sole state in the Indo-Pacific region currently subjected to UN Chapter VII sanctions. Through the adoption of ten resolutions since 2006, the UNSC has introduced new sanctions and expanded the arms embargo on North Korea. The total arms embargo on North Korea prohibits, among other things, the import or export of conventional arms, including small arms (since UNSCR 2270 in 2016), as well as a range of conventional arms-related items, equipment, goods, and technology (Small Arms Survey, 2023).

The regular reports of the UN 1718 Committee's Panel of Experts offer insight into North Korea's import and export activities since the advent of the sanctions regime.<sup>48</sup> These reports demonstrate that, despite the extensive nature of the sanctions, North Korea has continued to engage in the import and export of sanctioned goods across the world (Griffiths and Schroeder, 2020).

North Korean sanctions-evading activities are global in scope, but appear to be concentrated in East and South-east Asia (Arnold, 2023, p. 3).<sup>49</sup> The North Korea Panel of Experts reports contain many examples of suspected conventional arms transfers to and from North Korea, some with implications for the Indo-Pacific region. Two examples are:

- In 2017, the panel reported the use by North Korea of a Malaysia-based front company, Global Communications Co. Ltd (Glocom) for the transfer of military electronic equipment (UNSC, 2017, paras. 72–87). The panel noted that North Korea 'was able to establish a company in a third country, building up significant international recognition, including through participation in prominent regional arms fairs and by selling high-end arms and related materiel in multiple countries' (para. 87).
- In 2015, the panel provided a commentary (UNSC, 2015, paras. 125–67) on the UNSC's designation of North Korea's Ocean Maritime Management Company,



Weapons recovered by the Israeli military from areas hit by the Palestinian Hamas militants during their 7 October 2023 attack, reportedly containing North Korean-made F-7 rocket-propelled grenades.  
Source: AP Photo/Alon Bernstein

Limited (OMM) for targeted sanctions due to operations carried out through the company’s global network, using individuals and entities based in at least ten UN member states, including Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand (para. 128). Among its many activities, OMM played a key role in arranging the shipment of concealed arms and related materiel on board the vessel *Chong Chon Gang* (paras. 125, 135).<sup>50</sup>

Preliminary findings outlined in a recent report by 38North indicate that the total amount of small arms exports to North Korea has significantly decreased since 2016 and that the procurement of small arms from North Korea, following a decrease between 2009 and 2011, has been ‘on the rebound’ since 2015. The report notes, however, that the total dollar values of both exports and imports are rather small and do not appear to implicate any Indo-Pacific country in any significant or long-lasting way. According to the report, ‘the UN arms embargo on North Korea may have contributed to achiev-

ing its goal by making North Korea's trading of small arms costly and having to rely on illicit procurement channels' (Kim, 2022).

A truly comprehensive picture in relation to arms embargoes would require an examination of *all* Indo-Pacific region states in relation to actual or suspected breaches across *all* UN arms embargoes, past and present—a task well beyond the scope of this Report. Furthermore, it is difficult to demonstrate how and to what extent the existence of UNSC-imposed arms embargoes affects the export- and import-related decisions of Indo-Pacific states, and such sanctions are only one limited tool in efforts to reduce illicit transfers of conventional weapons. Their effectiveness depends primarily on the 'capacities and will of UN member states, particularly the UNSC P5 states, arms supplying states, transit and transshipment states, and states neighbouring embargoed targets' (Fruchart et al., 2007, p. 51).<sup>51</sup>

Nevertheless, some observations can be made:

- While it seems safe to conclude that many states have refused conventional weapon transfer requests based on their observation that the proposed transfer would violate a UN arms embargo, information on transfer requests that have been denied is not asked for in reporting to UN sanctions committees, in ATT reporting templates, or in trade data (Atwood, Giezendanner, and Timmermans, 2023).
- While not of the same mandatory nature as UN-imposed arms embargoes under Chapter VII, other multilateral arms and unilateral arms embargoes are or have been in place in the Indo-Pacific region. The European Union (EU), for example, has imposed an arms embargo on China since June 1989, Myanmar since July 1991, and North Korea since November 2006. The EU had also previously imposed an arms embargo on Indonesia (September 1999–January 2000) (SIPRI, n.d.a). Among nationally imposed arms embargoes, the United States has maintained an arms embargo on Cambodia since December 2021 and imposed one on Indonesia from 1999 to 2005 because of human rights violations in East Timor. It also imposed an embargo on Sri Lanka due to human rights violations by the Sri Lankan armed forces. The United Kingdom has applied an arms embargo on China since 1989, and a number of countries from within the region (for example, Australia, Japan, and South Korea) have imposed sanctions on North Korea in addition to the UN sanctions (Global Sanctions, 2024). Further investigation would be required to provide a full picture of whether and how these affect state behaviour in relation to arms transfers in the region. It is important to note, however, that the experience of being or having been subject to arms embargoes, particularly on the grounds of human rights violations, might raise concerns in importing countries in the region related to 'security of supply', and ultimately affect these countries' attitudes towards ratification and accession to the ATT (Holtom and Parker, 2016, pp. 10, 69).

## Privately made and other non-industrial small arms and light weapons

Privately made and other non-industrial small arms and light weapons include weapons that are produced outside a licensed industrial factory through a range of different non-industrial techniques (Small Arms Survey, 2024; Small Arms Survey, Instituto Sou da Paz, and UNIDIR, 2024).<sup>52</sup> These arms vary in quality and complexity, from rudimentary to high-tech manufacturing (Vecchioni and Topal, 2024). In some contexts, they constitute a sizeable and increasing segment of small arms production and illicit weapons.<sup>53</sup>

In the Indo-Pacific region, there is an important history of unlicensed craft production of weapons. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa area of Pakistan (bordering Afghanistan) is most known for this type of arms production. High numbers of locally made weapons are produced in workshops in the area and are widely available in arms bazaars (Malik, A., 2016).<sup>54</sup> Weapons manufactured in the area include well-crafted replicas of Chinese, Russian, Turkish, and US weapons, but also poorly made artisanal weapons (Malik, A., 2016). The latter constitute not only a safety risk because of their suboptimal quality, but also a security risk at the national level, and in the event of regional proliferation. For instance, due to their low cost and widespread availability, craft-manufactured weapons from Pakistan have fuelled insecurity and instability in Afghanistan for decades.<sup>55</sup>

The production of privately made and other non-industrial small arms and light weapons is also present in other countries in the Indo-Pacific region. In South Asia, craft and counterfeit weapons are manufactured in India and are also trafficked through the open border between India and Nepal (ImproGuns, 2014; Paudel, 2014). Bangladesh and Sri Lanka also have moderate levels of craft production. In South-east Asia, craft production of weapons has been documented in the Philippines (particularly in the area of Danao city) (Batchelor, 2003; GMA News Online, 2018; Gutierrez, 2019); Indonesia (ICG, 2010, pp. 5–7); and Cambodia.<sup>56</sup> In Myanmar, 3D-printed firearms have been documented in the arsenal of the country's rebels (Eydoux, 2022; Pike, 2022).<sup>57</sup> A craft-produced firearm was also used to assassinate Japan's former prime minister Shinzo Abe on 8 July 2022 (Jenzen-Jones and Senft, 2022). In Oceania, 3D-printed firearms are on the rise in Australia and New Zealand (Bright and Mann, 2022; Church, 2022). In other Oceanian countries, little data on craft firearms is available, but some studies indicate the presence of craft firearms in PNG and the Solomon Islands (Alpers, 2005, p. 45; Alpers and Twyford, 2003).<sup>58</sup> ●



Lack of engagement with UN fora and instruments relevant to the ATT stems from the lack of perceived relevance to national security needs and the challenge of demonstrating that the ATT itself is effective in addressing diversion.”

## Attitudes to the ATT in the Indo-Pacific region

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This section investigates the main attitudes towards the ATT in the Indo-Pacific region. It is divided into four main subsections, each focusing on a different subregion: Oceania, South-east Asia, East Asia, and South Asia. Each subsection provides a short overview of the arms trade and security concerns at the subregional level, presents some of the main efforts towards universalization and compliance conducted in the subregion in recent years, and analyses the main attitudes of countries in the subregion towards the ATT.

## Oceania<sup>59</sup>

Australia and New Zealand spearhead arms control efforts in Oceania, through active engagement in regional disarmament initiatives. The subregion has been involved in

**Table 4** ATT membership in Oceania, as of June 2024

| State                          | Status                     | Date                               |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Australia                      | State party (ratification) | Entry into force: 24 December 2014 |
| New Zealand                    | State party (ratification) | Entry into force: 24 December 2014 |
| Niue                           | State party (accession)    | Entry into force: 4 November 2020  |
| Palau                          | State party (ratification) | Entry into force: 7 July 2019      |
| Samoa                          | State party (ratification) | Entry into force: 24 December 2014 |
| Tuvalu                         | State party (ratification) | Entry into force: 3 December 2015  |
| Kiribati                       | Signatory                  | 25 September 2013                  |
| Nauru                          | Signatory                  | 25 September 2013                  |
| Vanuatu                        | Signatory                  | 26 July 2013                       |
| Federated States of Micronesia | –                          | –                                  |
| Fiji                           | –                          | –                                  |
| Marshall Islands               | –                          | –                                  |
| PNG                            | –                          | –                                  |
| Solomon Islands                | –                          | –                                  |
| Tonga                          | –                          | –                                  |

Source: ATT Secretariat (2024c)

arms control and disarmament efforts, not only through the states' own efforts but also through collective regional endeavours. Historical episodes of violence, including those in Bougainville and the Solomon Islands, catalysed significant disarmament programmes. At the regional level, declarations and agreements such as the Honiara Declaration and Aitutaki Declaration (PIF, 1992; 1997) and the Nadi Framework (Forum Regional Security Committee, 2000), along with the Pacific Islands Forum Model Weapons Control Bill (Control Arms, 2022, p. 97), outline comprehensive strategies for arms control. More recent collaborative security agreements, such as the Boe Declaration and the Peace and Security section within the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, advocate for a continued commitment to supporting global peace and security efforts (PIF, 2022). At the time of writing, six states from the subregion are ATT states parties (see Table 4).

While Oceania currently boasts one of the lowest levels of both armed violence and international arms trade globally, certain challenges exist nonetheless. PNG, for example, continues to grapple with ongoing violence in both urban and remote tribal areas. Though these internal conflicts pose limited risk to neighbouring island nations at present, there have been major incidents involving arms in the past. Arms contributed, for instance, to destabilization and coups in Fiji. The proliferation of arms in the Solomon Islands following the conflicts in Bougainville, between 1988 and 1998, also shows how armed violence has significantly affected countries in the region.

The maritime dimension is also an important feature of trade in the Pacific Islands, and climate change remains a priority for some islands, such as Fiji, whose ports are affected by hurricanes. Additionally, certain islands lack the necessary equipment to enforce policy, such as X-ray machines at border posts.

Multiple efforts have been made over the years to assist states in Oceania in signing and ratifying the ATT. The UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (through the UN Trust Facility Supporting Cooperation on Arms Regulation, UNSCAR) has funded various initiatives since 2014, with activities ranging from national awareness and advocacy to promoting the signing, ratification, and implementation of the ATT across the Pacific Islands in 2015. This effort expanded in 2015–16 to include specific countries such as Fiji, PNG, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu to advance ATT implementation in Oceania. By 2019, UNSCAR had supported the update of the repository GunPolicy.org with data on armed violence and gender-specific evidence for the broader Asia-Pacific region, including Fiji, Malaysia, Samoa, and Thailand, and the strengthening of controls to prevent illicit arms transfers (UNODA, 2024a). Additionally, the VTF supported Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands in 2018 to enhance the alignment of their arms control systems with ATT obligations (Palau, 2018). Initiatives such as the ATT Sponsorship Programme facilitated the attendance of several states from Oceania to Conferences of States Parties (CSPs) in Geneva (ATT Secretariat, 2024b).

## Australia

Australia is one of the biggest exporters of conventional arms in the region, and faces only limited levels of arms trafficking, mainly resulting from diversion from licensed individuals. Gun control became a major public policy priority in Australia following the Port Arthur massacre in 1996,<sup>60</sup> which catalysed a strict reform of firearms laws. This marked a turning point, reinforcing Australia's stance on arms control on both domestic and international fronts (CAVR, 2024). Australia's active participation in a wide variety of arms control treaties, from those on conventional weapons to those related to weapons of mass destruction, underscores its dedication to arms control.

Australia was instrumental to the ATT from the outset, championing the call for a Treaty through UNGA Resolution 61/89 in 2006 and playing a significant role in subsequent resolution drafts. A National Interest Analysis reveals Australia's proactive efforts in fostering an inclusive approach to Treaty preparations, involving extensive inter-agency consultations led by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Such consultations welcomed a broad spectrum of stakeholders, illustrating Australia's commitment to a comprehensive Treaty that addressed humanitarian, security, sport, and industry concerns without compromising lawful civil activities. Australia held the presidency of the final UN Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty and ratified the Treaty in 2014, consistently attending the CSPs and fulfilling its annual reporting obligations.

Australia aims to foster ATT universalization, particularly among its Indo-Pacific neighbours. This goal has been pursued through direct encouragement, regional diplomacy, and the provision of resources for VTF and UNSCAR grants designed to facilitate Treaty participation for Pacific Island states.

## Federated States of Micronesia

The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) is nuanced in its approach to global arms control and disarmament initiatives. Unlike many of its Pacific neighbours, FSM stands alone in not acceding to any of the principal conventional arms control treaties to date. FSM's regulatory stance on arms is categorized as 'permissive', a rare categorization within the context of the Pacific Island states (CAVR, 2024). Ownership of rifles for hunting in certain areas is legal with a permit, though handgun ownership is illegal, illustrating a nuanced firearms regulatory framework. Firearms are sometimes used for intimidation purposes, especially in rural localities (CAVR, 2024). Arms trafficking within FSM is limited, however, and the country is one of the least afflicted by gun violence in the Pacific Islands (Global Organized Crime Index, n.d.b).

Despite this permissiveness, FSM consistently supported the ATT resolutions at the UN First Committee meetings from 2019 to 2023, and voted in favour of the Treaty text during the negotiations, suggesting a positive stance towards the Treaty. The path-



way to FSM accession to the ATT appears to depend on increased involvement and demonstrated interest by its representatives in Treaty processes and workshops. While the current lack of known objections to ATT provisions suggests no inherent resistance to Treaty principles, an absence of momentum or interest towards joining remains (CAVR, 2024).

## Fiji

Fiji has strict gun ownership and manufacturing regulations. The country's commitment to international arms control is evident through its participation in the Mine Ban Convention, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), and the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM). Fiji is also a significant peacekeeping troop contributor on the global stage.

Tracing Fiji's journey towards ATT accession demonstrates changing perspectives in the country. During the negotiations of the ATT, Fiji's previous government abstained from the vote on the Treaty text, as well as from the ATT vote at the UN First Committee in 2019. Later, Fiji voted in favour of the ATT in both 2020 and 2021, but did not participate in 2022 and 2023. In 2023, the Fijian government expressed a clear intent to accede to the ATT, taking into consideration international assistance and cooperation (Fiji, 2023).

As an active troop-contributing country to peacekeeping operations, Fiji imports a wide range of arms and materiel, including naval vessels and Bushmasters.<sup>61</sup> Reservations within the military regarding the ATT's provisions, particularly around public disclosure, were however dispelled by efforts to clarify these concerns. This evolution underscores a consensus among security representatives on the acceptability of ATT accession—a view further reflected in Fiji's engagement in dialogues within the Melanesian Spearhead Group, indicating regional openness to the Treaty without fear of adverse diplomatic relations (CAVR, 2024).

Fiji's progress towards ATT accession involves the development of a national action plan (NAP) and national control list, a legislative gap analysis, and the drafting of necessary amendments, as well as extensive training across multiple agencies—activities spurred by both self-funded delegations' active participation in CSPs and regional advocacy. The country's active civil society, particularly women's groups focused on peace and security, played a crucial role in advocating for Fiji's ATT accession, despite sensitivities around the arms trade due to past political instability. Encouragement from Australia and New Zealand underscores international support for Fiji's path to accession, which is anticipated to be straightforward; the process requires approval from the country's cabinet and parliament, and existing legislation is largely in line with ATT requirements. This inclusive and multilateral approach to arms control positions Fiji as an advocate for the ATT within Oceania (Fiji, 2023).

## Kiribati

Kiribati's signing of the ATT in 2013, coupled with its ratification of the Mine Ban Convention in 2000, illustrates the country's commitment to arms control. While it has no military forces, Kiribati's approach to civilian firearms regulation is described as 'restrictive' (CAVR, 2024), underpinned by guiding legislation such as the Penal Code of 1977 and the Arms and Ammunition Ordinance (Kiribati, 1977).

During the Treaty negotiations, Kiribati was absent from the vote on the ATT text. Nevertheless, the country's signing of the Treaty, along with some participation in the CSPs, demonstrates an acknowledgment of the Treaty's significance in promoting global peace, security, and stability. In 2022, Kiribati articulated a strong commitment to ratification but also expressed concerns regarding emerging threats related to transnational organized crime and the potential for illicit arms use due to its geographical and economic environment (Kiribati, 2022).

In the absence of internal objections to joining the Treaty, and considering the country's restrictive arms control regime and negligible arms trade, Kiribati's primary challenge lies in the need for expert assistance and resource support to ratify and fully implement the Treaty. Success in securing VTF assistance may therefore catalyse the development of national capacities and legislative frameworks necessary for Treaty ratification (CAVR, 2024).

## Marshall Islands

The Marshall Islands enforce a 'restrictive' firearms regulation policy (CAVR, 2024), primarily guided by the Weapons Control Act of 1971, revised in 2004 (ICRC, n.d.), and the Firearms Control Act (Marshall Islands, 1983). UNROCA records reveal only a single instance of arms imports—80 small arms imported from the United States in 2020—since 1993. This minimal activity suggests a limited engagement in the global arms trade, aligning with its restrictive domestic policies.

The Marshall Islands voted in favour of the Treaty text in 2013 and has consistently supported the ATT resolutions at the UN First Committee from 2018 to 2023; however, although it acceded to the Mine Ban Convention, it has joined neither the ATT nor the CCM. This indicates a selective commitment to international arms control and disarmament efforts. The pathway to joining the ATT for the Marshall Islands involves a consideration of its regional context and internal priorities. The country's modest interest in the ATT thus far can be attributed to its small volume of arms and limited participation in other arms control instruments. Nevertheless, as neighbouring countries such as Kiribati engage more proactively with the ATT, it may encourage the Marshall Islands to reconsider its position on joining the Treaty (CAVR, 2024).

## Nauru

Nauru follows an explicit policy against civilian firearm possession. This strict firearms control policy is supported by the Arms and Opium Prohibition Ordinance of 1936–1967 (Nauru, 1967), which prohibits civilians from owning firearms and remains in effect to this day. Nauru signed the ATT in 2013 and acceded to both the Mine Ban Convention and the CCM in the same year.

Nauru's recent voting history in favour of the ATT resolution at the UN in 2022 and 2023, after previous absences from voting, indicates a supportive yet measured approach towards the Treaty. Although Nauru voted in favour of the Treaty text during the negotiations, the subsequent absence of opposition or objection to the ATT, coupled with considerations of relevance and priority given to other national matters (CAVR, 2024), reflects Nauru's position towards the Treaty. Considering Nauru's small population and the pragmatic constraints on Treaty participation, the pathway to ATT accession appears streamlined and unencumbered by the need for legal amendments. The fact that the country is seemingly already in compliance with a number of ATT obligations may present an opportunity to emphasize that accession would not impose undue burdens, and to draw parallels with other small Pacific Island states that have successfully joined the ATT (CAVR, 2024).

## New Zealand

New Zealand stands out as both a notable importer of small arms and an active exporter of ammunition within the Indo-Pacific region. The country plays a proactive and leading role in multilateral efforts towards disarmament and arms control, as illustrated by its ratification of all major treaties on conventional weapons, including the ATT in 2014.

Until November 2023, New Zealand had a minister of disarmament and arms control, the only position of its kind in Oceania. A 2021 amendment to its Strategic Goods regime reflects ongoing efforts to align more closely with ATT requirements (New Zealand, 2021). Ambassador Dell Higgin, a New Zealander and previous chairperson of the VTF Selection Committee, was notable for her significant contributions. New Zealand also funded several VTF grants for Pacific Island states and hosted regional conferences on the ATT, such as the Pacific Conference on Conventional Weapons Treaties in Auckland in 2018. Additionally, over the last few years New Zealand has co-organized annual Asia-Pacific roundtables on the ATT with Australia, Japan, and Control Arms.

With a foreign policy particularly focused on Oceania, New Zealand aims to heighten awareness of the ATT, initiate discussions on potential accession barriers, and provide tailored assistance to overcome these challenges (New Zealand, 2020). In 2014,



A SH-2G(I) Seasprite helicopter taking off from HMNZS *Aotearoa*, New Zealand.

Source: New Zealand Defence Force

New Zealand supported the development of a model law to assist Oceanian states in implementing the ATT, in cooperation with the Small Arms Survey (New Zealand and Small Arms Survey, 2014).

## Niue

Niue, despite being a small country, has joined prominent international treaties such as the Mine Ban Convention in 1998, the CCM, and the TPNW. Currently, Niue has not reported in the UNROCA or the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (PoA), underscoring its low profile in global arms dynamics.

Niue's interest towards the ATT has evolved—particularly following an incident of gun violence in 2012, after which the country actively considered the Treaty and acceded to it in 2020. Niue was an active participant in the Regional Pacific Islands workshop on addressing the illicit trade of small arms in 2018 (PGA, 2020). Despite this progression, Niue faces challenges in meeting its reporting obligations under the ATT, and has so far submitted neither an initial report nor an annual report. Yet, the country's journey from experiencing gun-related violence to ATT accession suggests a narrative

that underscores the Treaty’s objectives, even for countries with small populations (roughly 1,500 for Niue) (CAVR, 2024).

## Palau

Palau is not directly involved in the international arms trade. Despite this, the country has submitted 11 ‘nil’ reports to UNROCA, most recently in 2022. It is active in international arms control processes and stands out among most Pacific Island states for having ratified all three main conventional arms control treaties: the ATT, the CCM, and the Mine Ban Convention.

Palau ratified the ATT in 2019, after completing the first of its two VTF-supported projects, implemented by CAVR. Crucially, the first project included working with Palau Senate representatives on a Cabinet Paper and a resolution in favour of ATT ratification. As part of this process, Palau formed a Working Group on the ATT, which consisted of representatives of the Vice President’s Office; the Ministry of State (Divisions of Foreign Affairs and Internal Affairs); the Bureau of Public Safety; the Bureau of Commercial Development; the Bureau of Maritime Security, Fish and Wildlife Protection; the Foreign Investment Board; the Bureau of Immigration and Labour; the Ministry of Natural Resources, Environment and Tourism; the Narcotics Enforcement Agency; and the Bureau of Revenue, Customs, and Taxation. The participants took part in a national workshop, following which the national point of contact consulted with legal advisers to the Palau Senate to submit the Resolution. Since joining the Treaty, Palau has been consistent in its annual reporting and is the only one of the four Pacific Island states parties to have submitted all required ATT reports.

Despite being a small country with no involvement in the global arms trade, Palau is fulfilling its reporting obligations under the ATT. With such a small population, and a government stretched across many issues, Palau representatives can hardly be expected to actively support other Oceanian states. Instead, Palau’s success could guide other countries’ CSOs in gathering available information from Palau representatives and using it to support ATT universalization within their own country.

## Papua New Guinea

PNG faces a significant risk of arms trafficking exacerbated by its vast and largely unprotected coastal borders, which make it particularly vulnerable to the trafficking of arms and other illicit materials (PNG, 2014; see Box 2). The complex mosaic of power and economic relations among tribal communities across PNG’s territory also presents particular hurdles for arms control in the country, albeit offering an incentive to join the ATT. Despite these challenges, PNG has demonstrated a willingness to engage with the global community on disarmament, notably through its accession to

the Mine Ban Convention. Efforts towards disarmament, particularly in the aftermath of the Bougainville conflict,<sup>62</sup> have led to significant strides in reducing gun-related violence within PNG. Notably, the Bougainville peace process and subsequent disarmament initiatives, including the destruction of one-third of the country's military small arms inventory by the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF), with Australian government support, have positioned the PNGDF as one of the military forces with the highest firearm destruction ratios globally (Alpers, 2008).

Nevertheless, attitudes towards the ATT in PNG have resulted in a mix of cautious interest and slow progress, with the current government expressing a renewed focus on arms control and the potential benefits of ATT membership. In 2005, PNG organized a Gun Summit whose 244 recommendations were not implemented due to a lack of prioritization (The National, 2011; CAVR, 2024; Haley and Muggah, 2006).<sup>63</sup> To date, although PNG is neither a state party nor a signatory of the ATT, the country has participated in a number of ATT-related workshops and training programmes arranged by CAVR and UNRCPD. In 2022, UNRCPD also conducted a review of the country's small arms-related policy and legal frameworks to assess their compliance with the UN PoA and the ATT. Domestically, a few CSOs from PNG and Bougainville have been active in ATT-related discussions over the past decade, including the Peace Foundation of Melanesia and members of PNG's International Humanitarian Law Committee. As such, the main benefits of joining the ATT for PNG concern the reduction of diversion, family violence, and cross-border smuggling (CAVR, 2024; The National, 2024). With assistance from the VTF and other donors, as well as continued capacity-building efforts, PNG's pathway to joining the ATT appears more feasible, underlining the importance of sustained international support and collaboration to facilitate the country's accession to the Treaty.

## Samoa

Samoa's use of firearms is restricted: only the Tactical Operations Section of the country's police force is armed, and a few rifles and shotguns are allowed for farming purposes. All firearms registered in the country are recorded in the police force register (CAVR, 2024; Samoa, 2024).

Samoa was supportive of the ATT from the beginning, voting in favour of the Treaty text. In 2013, Tuila'epa Sa'ilele Malielegaoi, the former prime minister of Samoa, expressed the country's commitment to arms control, highlighting the significant impact that even a minor number of small arms can have on the stability of small island countries (Samoa, 2013). Consequently, Samoa ratified the ATT in 2014, becoming the first Pacific Island state to do so. Following its ATT ratification, Samoa benefited from VTF support, focusing on data collection and reporting, created the Conventional Arms Act—which also includes a national control list—in 2017, and further revised

its Arms and Ammunition Act in 2018 to strengthen its compliance with the Treaty's obligations. Samoa submitted an initial ATT report in 2015, which is publicly available. The country's last annual ATT report was in 2018, leaving it several years behind. Nevertheless, Samoa has submitted more UNROCA reports (17 since 1993) than any other Pacific Island state.

Samoa's main challenges are related to limited human, technical, and financial resources for implementing the different international instruments (Samoa, 2024). Furthermore, the isolation of Pacific Island states poses challenges in terms of monitoring transfers and trans-shipments. Nonetheless, Samoa actively encouraged other countries in the subregion to join the ATT, emphasizing the Treaty's comprehensive approach to regional security, which includes strict border control measures. This stance is reinforced by the Boe Declaration on Regional Security, which broadens the concept of security to include threats from climate change, environmental factors, and gender-based violence—a recognized issue in Samoa's national security policy (Samoa, 2019).

## Solomon Islands

Following a tumultuous period of armed violence known as 'the Tensions', the Solomon Islands, backed by the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands in 2003, prioritized the collection and destruction of firearms from both the police and civilians, leading to a remarkable disarmament success story (Alpers, Muggah, and Twyford, 2004). The Solomon Islands began importing small arms for police forces in 2021. The country maintained support for the ATT text during the negotiations, as well as for UN First Committee ATT resolutions from 2019 to 2023. In addition, it has submitted 14 reports to UNROCA. The country's ratification of the Mine Ban Convention in 1999 underscores its engagement with international disarmament efforts, despite having joined neither the ATT nor the CCM (CAVR, 2024).

Over the last few years, the Solomon Islands has engaged in regional and local ATT workshops, highlighting the country's recognition of the necessity for international and regional cooperation in order to effectively implement the ATT. Such activities underscored the importance of establishing a lead agency for ATT coordination and fostering inter-agency cooperation among law enforcement, regulatory bodies, and other stakeholders to ensure the Treaty's successful adoption and implementation (Solomon Islands, 2016). The recent increase in arms imports for police use represents a renewed opportunity to advocate for the Solomon Islands' accession to the ATT.

## Tonga

Tonga controls its firearms under a regulatory framework led by the Arms and Ammunition Act of 1968 and the Arms and Ammunition Regulations of 1969 (CAVR, 2024).

Despite the restrictive nature of its firearms legislation, Tonga has had minimal engagement in international arms control reporting mechanisms, such as the UN PoA, and has not submitted any reports to UNROCA since 2006. Although providing troop deployments in international coalitions and peacekeeping missions, Tonga has not acceded to any major conventional arms control treaties, including the ATT.

During the ATT negotiations, Tonga voted in favour of the Treaty text. Recent voting patterns at the UN First Committee also indicate a positive stance towards the Treaty, with affirmative votes cast in support of the ATT First Committee resolutions, excluding the vote in 2019 in which the country did not participate. Tonga's stance on the ATT reflects a growing awareness of the region's susceptibility to the illegal arms trade and the risks it poses to citizens' safety, security, and well-being. In 2015, Tongan representatives participated in a workshop on the ratification and implementation processes of the ATT, designed to raise awareness of the Treaty's benefits. At that time, Tonga's Lord Speaker Tu'ivakano expressed confidence that the insights gained from the workshop would accelerate Tonga's efforts towards joining the Treaty (Tonga, 2015). Concerns were raised that without joining the ATT, Tonga could potentially become a transit point for the illegal arms trade, underscoring the urgency for action to mitigate such risks (Matangi Tonga Online, 2016). Despite this emerging recognition and the lack of substantive barriers to accession, however, the government has not prioritized joining conventional arms control treaties, which limits the prospects of Tonga joining the ATT soon.

## Tuvalu

Tuvalu demonstrated its commitment to arms control by joining both the Mine Ban Convention and the ATT. Tuvalu showed support for the ATT from the outset. The country voted in favour of the Treaty text during the negotiations and signed the Treaty the day it opened for signature. Tuvalu then ratified the Treaty in 2015, following assistance efforts coordinated by regional CSOs, including the Melanesian Spearhead Group and the Pacific Small Arms Action Group, a network coordinated by CAVR. Tuvalu has submitted a confidential initial ATT report, and nil annual reports for 2017 and 2018. No subsequent annual reports have been submitted (CAVR, 2024).

## Vanuatu

Vanuatu exhibits a proactive stance on arms control, illustrated by its adherence to the Mine Ban Convention and signature of the ATT in 2013. Vanuatu's legislative framework governing arms control, notably the Firearms Act (Vanuatu, 1988), is distinguished by its restrictive nature. This framework effectively functions as a de facto control list, barring various types of arms and ammunition, including automatic and



semi-automatic firearms, alongside pistols, revolvers, and specific calibres of firearms and ammunition.

The path towards ratification of the ATT in Vanuatu has progressed at a deliberate pace, reflecting the country's intent to ensure comprehensive national consultations and establish adequate capacity for Treaty implementation. Vanuatu's accession to the Treaty may prevent the influx of illicit arms, particularly through maritime routes (Cullwick, 2016). Despite facing capacity challenges and disruptions caused by Covid-19, Vanuatu has made significant progress in consultation and training efforts, indicating no specific political objection to ATT accession. Looking forward, the pathway for Vanuatu to join the ATT appears straightforward, considering its already restrictive arms control system. This suggests that, with technical assistance from CSOs and a renewed push for national advocacy, Vanuatu could accede to the Treaty without major difficulty (CAVR, 2024).

## South-east Asia<sup>64</sup>

South-east Asia's strategic and geopolitical significance in the global arms trade is shaped by its historical context, current security challenges, and evolving global political dynamics. The subregion, historically at the centre of numerous conflicts ranging from colonial struggles to the repercussions of world wars, now finds itself at the intersection of emerging global powers such as China, India, and Russia. This transition directly impacts South-east Asia's stance towards arms control and the ATT. Decolonization post-Second World War and enduring the brunt of armed conflicts have led several states within the region to adopt stringent approaches towards weapon possession, with some countries implementing near-total bans on civilian firearm ownership.

South-east Asia's alliances and geopolitical influences—ranging from affiliations with global superpowers such as the United States and China, to regional security challenges such as the South China Sea disputes and the crisis in Myanmar—reflect the factors shaping its engagement with the ATT. Recent years have seen the region become a significant market within the global arms trade amid ongoing internal and regional security threats, highlighting the dual role of South-east Asian countries as both importers and exporters of military hardware. China's accession to the ATT in 2020 and growing presence as an arms supplier offering accessible and affordable military options, coupled with ongoing military modernization efforts across the region, could catalyse changes in how South-east Asian nations perceive their participation in the ATT (see Table 5).

Over the past decade, significant assistance efforts have been directed towards South-east Asian states to support their accession to and alignment with the ATT.

**Table 5** ATT membership in South-east Asia, as of June 2024

| State       | Status                     | Date                           |
|-------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Philippines | State party (ratification) | Entry into force: 22 June 2022 |
| Cambodia    | Signatory                  | 18 October 2013                |
| Malaysia    | Signatory                  | 26 September 2013              |
| Singapore   | Signatory                  | 5 December 2014                |
| Thailand    | Signatory                  | 25 November 2014               |
| Brunei      | –                          | –                              |
| Indonesia   | –                          | –                              |
| Laos        | –                          | –                              |
| Myanmar     | –                          | –                              |
| Timor-Leste | –                          | –                              |
| Vietnam     | –                          | –                              |

Source: ATT Secretariat (2024c)

Organizations such as Expertise France, BAFA, and UNRCPD, as well as funding mechanisms such as UNSCAR and VTF, including a variety of implementing partners, have played significant roles in these initiatives. These efforts encompass a wide spectrum of activities, including advocacy, capacity building, technical and legal assistance, and the development of NAPs. They range from national awareness and advocacy campaigns for the domestication of the ATT, the promotion of ATT ratification, and the implementation of the UN PoA through capacity building and the sharing of best practices. For example, workshops and roundtable discussions have been organized to understand barriers and obstacles towards the universalization of the ATT in Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. Legal assistance projects were carried out by UNRCPD to support the implementation of the UN PoA and ATT in Cambodia, Timor-Leste, and the Philippines. Furthermore, the VTF and UNSCAR undertook initiatives such as the development of training courses on licensing, investigation, and enforcement policies, and the strengthening of inter-agency engagement towards multilateral cooperation on conventional weapons regulations. Region-specific projects, such as those promoting transparency in armaments through UNROCA reporting within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region or addressing gun violence and illicit small arms trafficking from a gender perspective, also illustrate the multilevel approach of these efforts (UNODA, 2024b).<sup>65</sup>

## Brunei

Brunei's engagement with the global arms trade is limited, with arms trafficking not perceived as a significant concern within its borders. The possession and transfer of weapons in the country is subject to strict domestic legislation.

During the ATT negotiations, Brunei maintained a reserved position, aligning with ASEAN's collective statements without making independent interventions. Brunei's recognition of the threat posed by the illicit international transfer of small arms and light weapons (Holtom and Parker, 2016) hints at a supportive stance towards the principles underpinning the ATT—despite not making a specific reference to the Treaty itself. To date, Brunei has not joined the ATT. The country's lack of engagement with UN fora and instruments relevant to the ATT stems from the lack of perceived relevance to national security needs and the challenge of demonstrating that the ATT itself is effective in addressing diversion (NISEA, 2024). Consequently, the ATT has not been elevated to a matter of high national importance, leading to a lack of active participation from authorities, regardless of whether Brunei leans for or against the ATT. Moreover, concerns related to the diversion and illicit trade of arms within the context of the ATT are not as significant for Brunei as other issues such as the environment, disaster risk reduction, and natural resources. For Brunei, 'ASEAN sits at the heart of Brunei's multilateral engagements in the Defence and Security domain, and specifically from a Defence perspective' (Brunei, 2021). Consequently, the Mine Ban Convention or the TPNW seem to be perceived by Brunei as contributing more to peace and security in the region than the ATT.

Brunei's strict domestic controls on arms and ammunition, coupled with its limited exposure to illicit arms trafficking, shape its perception of the ATT as a low national priority. Additionally, the perception that ASEAN engagements sufficiently address Brunei's defence and security interests further attenuate the incentive to access the Treaty.

## Cambodia

Cambodia is an active importer of small arms and exporter of ammunition in the region, with very strict domestic legislation, prohibiting the import of weapons for any reason other than national defence. Although Cambodia is not a transit site, as a landlocked country with several bordering neighbours it faces broader challenges related to arms control. The country has banned civilian ownership of firearms and has different laws and regulations on firearms (NISEA, 2024). Illicit trafficking is, however, a continuing challenge.

Cambodia was a strong supporter of the ATT when CSOs, led by the network of the Working Group on Weapons Reduction, started encouraging the country in 2001–03

to sponsor the Treaty. During the ATT negotiations, Cambodia championed the Treaty and was one of the first three states to publicly support it, together with Mali and Costa Rica (Green and Macdonald, 2015). Cambodia's vocal support continued through the negotiation process to the signing of the Treaty in 2013. In the following years, although it received the visit of the CSP4 president to discuss universalization (ATT Secretariat, 2018b), Cambodia's direct involvement in Treaty universalization appears to have become more moderated, influenced by limited resources and personnel. Instead, since 2020, Cambodia has focused its efforts on enhancing national capacity related to arms trade regulations. For instance, in 2020, the CAMCONTROL Directorate-General, under the mandate of the Ministry of Commerce on import and export controls, was restructured to become the Consumer Protection Competition and Fraud Repression Directorate-General. Since the appointment of the new cabinet ministers, Cambodia has worked to update its legislation to meet the developing needs of the state, including laws that cover trade controls and weapons regulations (NISEA, 2024). The offices mandated to implement the Treaty are still growing, however, and may lack sufficient personnel to handle all concerns related to the Treaty for some time.

The country has received international cooperation and assistance and capacity-building support from a series of entities and partners, such as UNRCPD in 2022, and Control Arms through VTF funding in 2023 (ATT Secretariat, 2024e). While a lack of capacity to implement the Treaty, including the streamlining of national policies and structures, has been a challenge for Cambodia over the last decade, the country's main challenge today lies in the need to increase the number of people working on ATT implementation. Cambodia is working to expand the number of personnel with expertise on arms control issues, especially following the country's leadership role in the adoption of the ASEAN Declaration on Combating Arms Smuggling (ASEAN, 2023). Acquiring the requisite level of expertise is a long process, however, and the shift in the country's governance following the July 2023 elections, leading to a younger generation assuming roles in the workforce and cabinet, may introduce another layer of challenges (NISEA, 2024).

## Indonesia

Following the lifting of a US embargo in 2005, Indonesia not only increased its arms imports, but also sought to become a self-sufficient arms producer (Stanley-Lockman, 2019). The country has pivoted towards diverse sources for procuring its arms, including deals with France for combat aircraft—illustrating a pragmatic approach to fortifying its defence capacity while navigating geopolitical sensitivities, especially with major trading partners such as China (Wezeman, P.D., Gadon, and S.T. Wezeman, 2023). Indonesia has been active in the global arms landscape, as both an importer and an exporter of small arms.

During the early stages of ATT negotiations, Indonesia positioned itself as a vocal advocate for state sovereignty and the right to self-defence, declaring that trade in arms for self-defence purposes should remain unhampered. The country highlighted concerns over the Treaty's potential to limit states' abilities to acquire, produce, and transfer conventional arms, emphasizing the significance of maintaining territorial integrity and the right to develop defence industries. Indonesia's stance, reiterated in 2023, was indicative of its aspiration for a 'balanced' Treaty that would not disproportionately empower exporting states at the expense of importers' rights (Indonesia, 2023). Since the enactment of the ATT, Indonesia has not joined the Treaty, but has underlined, along with other states, the insufficiency of the ATT alone in curbing illicit arms proliferation and diversion.

Prioritizing regional cooperation and transparency, Indonesia emphasized the importance of shared experiences and regional cooperation (Indonesia, 2023), 'preferring to engage with countries in South-east Asia either bilaterally or regionally to regulate and monitor arms transfers within the region' (NISEA, 2024). Like other states in the subregion, Indonesia prioritizes counter-terrorism and anti-smuggling efforts, given its experiences with several national security incidents. For instance, under Indonesia's Chairmanship, the ASEAN–UN Plan of Action to Implement the Joint Declaration on Comprehensive Partnership between ASEAN and the United Nations (2021–25) mentioned measures on weapons smuggling and arms control treaties (ASEAN, 2021). Indonesia's endorsement of the ASEAN Declaration on Combating Arms Smuggling during the Seventeenth ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime, convened in Labuan Bajo, Indonesia, on 21 August 2023, helped with its adoption, and showed that Indonesia and ASEAN members are working on various international and regional arms control efforts.

## Laos

Information from Laos on its involvement in the global arms trade remains limited, suggesting a light footprint, mostly related to small arms imports. Along with its relatively low-profile participation in the ATT negotiations, the country did not submit its views on the ATT when invited to by the Secretary-General and has not engaged during CSPs. This trend aligns with a broader regional pattern within ASEAN, where collective positions are often favoured over individual member states' interventions in global diplomatic arenas. Since the adoption of the ATT, Laos has not joined the Treaty.

Similarly to other smaller developing states in the region, this cautiousness is possibly influenced by resource constraints and the limited number of personnel in the government structure (NISEA, 2024). These challenges are further accentuated by Laos' unique 'land-linked' geography (ITA, 2024). This geographical aspect, promoted by Laos to highlight its strategic connectivity, also carries inherent challenges in

monitoring arms transfers, enforcing controls, and ensuring compliance with arms regulations. Nevertheless, Laos has benefited from multiple capacity-building efforts by CSOs over the last few years. In 2021, UNRCPD conducted a training programme on gender-mainstreaming small arms control, resulting in a workshop, held in 2022, on reviewing the NAP relevant to gender-responsive small arms control.

## Malaysia

Malaysia is one of the main importers as well as an exporter of small arms in the Indo-Pacific region. Although Malaysia imposed a total ban on civilian arms possession, the country faces limited to moderate levels of arms trafficking, partially fuelled by other illicit activities such as the drug trade (Dahari, Idris and Othman, 2019).

Malaysia participated constructively throughout the ATT negotiation process. Zahid Rastam was appointed as facilitator by the president to conduct informal discussions on transit or trans-shipment (Woolcott, 2014, p. 4), and the country advocated for a Treaty that would robustly address the illegal arms trade without infringing upon legitimate rights to self-defence. Malaysia's contribution to the dialogue was underscored by its support for a strong Treaty framework, which resulted in a vote in favour of the final text of the Treaty. Malaysia signed the Treaty in 2013, but has yet to ratify it. Nevertheless, the country regularly reaffirms its commitment towards the ATT objectives during the various CSPs that it has attended. Malaysia actively participates in different regional capacity-building activities,<sup>66</sup> and engages its neighbours to promote its Strategic Trade Act as a model for export control in the region. Malaysia is also active in other processes such as the UN PoA (Malaysia, 2023).

Despite its positive stance, Malaysia encounters challenges in ratifying and implementing the ATT, largely due to internal political dynamics and leadership transitions—the country has seen five prime ministers in the last decade (2014–24). It also faces consistent challenges related to monitoring arms transfers and ensuring the effective enforcement of the Treaty's provisions. Malaysia should be on its way to ratifying the Treaty once difficulties presented by the leadership transitions in government structures are overcome (NISEA, 2024).

Malaysia's stand against the transfer of arms to Israel in relation to the 2023–24 war in Gaza, which prohibited Israeli ships from docking at its ports, echoes other states' concern over major arms exporters' compliance with the ATT (Chen, 2023a).

## Myanmar

Currently subject to sanctions imposed by the EU, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada, Myanmar's choice of arms suppliers is a political calculation

aimed at preventing isolation while avoiding over-dependency. The country relies on imports due to its inadequate domestic industrial production. Myanmar's delicate balancing act between major regional arms suppliers, notably China and India, underscores not only a strategy to circumvent the effects of these sanctions, but also a strategic approach to maintaining sovereignty and autonomy in the face of complex internal conflicts (Liu, Miao, and Huan, 2022). Since the coup in 2021, Myanmar has substantially increased its imports, amounting to more than USD 1 billion, mainly from China and Russia, used in the escalation of the armed conflict against insurgent forces fighting the military government (Chen, 2023b).

During the ATT negotiations, Myanmar abstained from voting on the resolution to adopt the ATT and has not joined the Treaty since then. Its lack of participation in CSPs and the absence of publicly available positions regarding the Treaty underscore Myanmar's peripheral role in international arms control. During CSP9, a side event examined support to Myanmar's military and its implications for the ATT, highlighting ongoing international concerns regarding arms transfers to the country (Control Arms and the EU Delegation to the UN, 2023). Ongoing arms transfers to Myanmar from ATT states parties, signatories, and non-states parties, despite allegations of human rights violations and the post-coup military escalation, illustrate the geopolitical intricacies of engaging with Myanmar's military rulers (OHCHR, 2023).<sup>67</sup>

Myanmar thus faces significant challenges related to the implementation of and compliance with conventional arms trade norms. Internally, the proliferation of small arms exacerbates conflicts, organized crime, and political violence. Externally, arms transfers from major suppliers, despite international sanctions, underscore the limitations of current global arms control mechanisms in curbing flows to contentious states (AOAV, 2023). The country, 'which saw a democratization process underway prior to the 2021 military coup, need[s] to address national concerns on the legitimacy to govern while addressing the internal conflicts before considering ATT ratification' (NISEA, 2024).

## Philippines

The Philippines plays an active role in the global arms trade, as a significant exporter of small arms and ammunition within the Indo-Pacific region. The Philippines is also one of the states in the region most affected by arms trafficking, due to its archipelagic nature, long coastlines, diversion from national stockpiles, and trafficking activities by non-state actors (Global Organized Crime Index, n.d.b). The path towards ATT ratification in the Philippines was a complex journey influenced by factors such as governmental priorities, gaps in awareness regarding the Treaty's implications, and lobbying actions by the gun industry.





Villagers plant rice while armed with their rifles to defend their village from Islamic State attacks in Datu Piang, Philippines, September 2018. Source: Getty Images/Jes Aznar

During the preparatory and negotiating phases of the ATT, the Philippines demonstrated a high level of engagement, hosting regional meetings and actively contributing to dialogue designed to shape the Treaty. Its stance, as relayed to the Secretary-General during the negotiations phase, emphasized the intrinsic right of states to acquire arms for legitimate self-defence and security needs without international restraint. Through its interventions, the Philippines consistently advocated for a Treaty framework that respects state sovereignty, self-defence rights, and the socio-economic development of countries, showcasing its commitment to ensuring that the ATT aligns with national and regional interests (Holtom and Parker, 2016).

After signing the Treaty in 2013, the ratification process encountered notable resistance due to competing government priorities, a lack of understanding of the ATT aims and impacts, and opposition from gun lobbyists (Cruz-Ferrer and Lubang, 2022); however, the advocacy and participation of CSOs since 2003, alongside the pressing need highlighted by the Marawi siege in 2017,<sup>68</sup> pivoted the national conversation towards the necessity of the Treaty. The significant impact of the siege by Islamic State-aligned armed groups, demonstrating how armed groups could amass hundreds of weapons, reiterated the urgent need for stricter arms control—an objective central to the ATT (Austero and Gorospe, 2019).



President Duterte’s eventual ratification of the Treaty, along with the Senate’s concurrence, in 2022—after extensive deliberation and support from various government agencies and CSOs—represented a significant move towards fostering international cooperation, strengthening national regulations, and enabling intelligence sharing among states parties (Cruz-Ferrer and Lubang, 2022). All relevant government authorities submitted a position paper in favour of the ratification of the Treaty. Each institution or authority outlined the challenges they faced in import and export activities, indicated where further controls would be necessary, and provided concrete proposals for overcoming these challenges. The successful ratification of the Treaty marked a significant milestone for the Philippines, reflecting its approach to Treaty ratification that involved: raising national awareness; building national capacity; and addressing arms industry concerns (NISEA, 2024).

Since 2015 the Philippines has been implementing the Strategic Trade Management Act (STMA), which provides the legal framework to implement most of the ATT obligations. The country has established the Strategic Management Trade Office within the Department of Trade and Partnership, overseeing the implementation of the STMA and its Implementing Rules and Regulations (Philippines, 2020). Additionally, the Philippines has been a recipient of assistance and outreach activities from the VTF, the ATT Sponsorship Programme, the ATT Secretariat, UNSCAR, and the EU ATT Outreach Programme, as well as from bilateral donors.<sup>69</sup> The country participated in the Jakarta regional workshop to promote the ATT in the ASEAN region in May 2023 and reiterated its commitment to advance ATT universalization in the region. This includes sharing its national awareness-raising initiatives, its domestic legal framework to support other countries in establishing policy and regulatory infrastructures consistent with the ATT, and its own experience with the ATT ratification process (Philippines, 2023).

Furthermore, the Philippines took a proactive role in other initiatives to regulate weapons at the regional level. The country’s Office of the Special Envoy on Transnational Crime, together with NISEA and with UNSCAR support, initiated the Regional Roadmap on Weapons Regulation in Asia-Pacific. Launched in December 2023, the roadmap is the result of five years of consultations among South Asian and South-east Asian states, including ASEAN members, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Aiming to harmonize national regulations on weapons, the roadmap covers a wide range of priorities and challenges; actively engages with civil society representatives (including through gender equality and women’s empowerment); and addresses arms brokering regulation, transparent arms transfers, and combating the illicit trade (Philippines, 2024).

## Singapore

Singapore is an active participant in the global arms market, notably as a producer and exporter of small arms and related ammunition in the region. The country does not face significant illicit arms trafficking issues.

During the ATT negotiations, Singapore voted in favour of the Treaty. Singapore's interventions during the negotiation phase consistently highlighted the importance of leaving the primary responsibility of arms trade regulation to national authorities, advocating for a Treaty that respects each country's unique circumstances and control systems. Singapore signed the Treaty in 2014, and has consistently attended and shared its experience at every CSP, while also contributing to other global initiatives such as the UN PoA and the International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons (ITI). The country has one of the most capable export control regimes in the region to combat the illicit arms trade, underpinned by the Guns, Explosives and Weapons Control Act (Singapore, 2021); the Regulation of Imports and Exports Act (Singapore, 1995); and the Strategic Goods (Control) Act (Singapore, 2002)—which are comprehensive enough to cover all provisions and obligations under the ATT.

Singapore is a global transit and trans-shipment hub and has an expanding defence industry. The country remains committed to ensuring control of strategic goods. A notable example is the prosecution of local dealers who violated the Strategic Goods Act by selling sensitive technology—a 'multi-beam echo sounder system for seabed mapping'—that eventually reached the Myanmar navy (Devaraj, 2023). In case of ATT ratification, Singapore's leadership in addressing the strategic trade of goods in the region could contribute significantly to strengthening the effective implementation of the ATT and set an example at the subregional level.

## Thailand

Thailand both imports and exports conventional arms. The country's defence strategy underscores the importance of maintaining a certain level of military capability. This dynamic is further strengthened due to Thailand's history as a major transit point for arms trafficking, especially during periods of civil unrest in its neighbouring countries such as Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Vietnam. Thailand continues to face a significant risk of arms trafficking.

Throughout the Treaty negotiations, Thailand demonstrated an understanding of the balances required between sovereign defence needs and international arms control efforts. The country supported the ATT, recognizing its potential global impact on both states parties and non-states parties; however, it also raised the need for the Treaty to ensure the right of states to manufacture, import, export, transfer, and retain conventional arms to meet their own security and defence needs, without adding costs that would affect the legitimate trade of arms.

The country signed the Treaty in 2014, and, since then, has consistently participated and given speeches at CSPs. In 2015, it established an inter-agency subcommittee tasked with preparing for ratification that has been analysing domestic legislation

to ensure compliance with the Treaty (Thailand, 2023). The current legal framework includes provisions on national control lists, production, export, import, transit, transshipment, and export assessments, including the prevention of diversion. At the time of writing, discussions are ongoing to ensure brokering controls (BAFA, 2024). Thailand recognizes the ATT's relevance, encouraging synergies with other international instruments such as the ITI, and has regularly sought to bolster international cooperation by joining several capacity-building and experience-sharing events throughout the years (Thailand, 2023).<sup>70</sup>

Thailand is already implementing several provisions of the Treaty. The main challenges to ratification were related to updating national legislation, identifying a possible national focal point for Treaty implementation, and overcoming uncertainties over internal ratification processes. Possible compliance challenges include annual reporting, ensuring the expertise of the different agencies implementing the ATT and effective implementation, and receiving multilateral and bilateral cooperation to build capacity (BAFA, 2024). Reconciling defence industry interests with the Treaty's obligations is also key. ASEAN members were divided in voting on the UNGA resolution urging member states to 'prevent the flow of arms' to Myanmar: four of the ten members—Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand—abstained in the vote (*Bangkok Post*, 2021). Furthermore, arms trafficking and smuggling, given Thailand's geographical position and history as a regional transit hub, also pose challenges, together with internal armed conflicts in southern Thailand.

## Timor-Leste

Timor-Leste is a country shaped by its tumultuous history, particularly its struggle for independence (1975–99) and subsequent periods of internal conflict during the transitional period (1999–2012) (Sugito and Anam, 2022). The country's historical background has fostered a government stance that strongly favours strict regulations regarding the civilian possession of weapons, essentially working towards a near-total ban (NISEA, 2024). This policy underscores Timor-Leste's efforts to maintain peace and ensure security internally, prioritizing the prevention of any form of armed violence that could destabilize its rebuilding efforts.

During the Treaty negotiations, Timor-Leste demonstrated support for the Treaty by voting in favour of the UNGA resolution on the ATT text. Since then, however, the country has neither joined the Treaty, nor engaged in the CSPs. Looking at other conventional weapons treaties, Timor-Leste has only acceded to the Mine Ban Convention (UNRCPD, n.d.). Nevertheless, it engaged several times with UN agencies to benefit from technical assistance with regards to the ATT, and participated in regional and international discussions on the subject. Notably, in May 2022, the country's minister of foreign affairs and cooperation engaged with UNRCPD in a training session on

gender and small arms control, as well as in a workshop on national coordination mechanisms and NAPs on small arms and light weapons (UNRCPD, 2020b).

Despite Timor-Leste's support for the ATT and its underlying principles, the country faces significant challenges in fully implementing the Treaty, including in building the necessary institutional capacity to enforce the Treaty's provisions effectively. Operating with limited resources, Timor-Leste may have to double its work to link national priorities with the ATT objectives, while also addressing other pressing national priorities, including climate vulnerability.

## Vietnam

Vietnam's approach to the arms trade is significantly influenced by its historical context, characterized by prolonged periods of conflict and a concerted effort towards national defence and security in the post-war era. This has resulted in a highly restrictive regime on civilian possession of weapons. Vietnam is now both an importer and a limited exporter of small arms and has developed its national defence industry. The country's defence strategy, aimed at modernizing its military forces and diversifying its arms sources to avoid dependencies, underscores the broader objective of safeguarding national sovereignty and security (Guarascio and Vu, 2022; Stanley-Lockman, 2019).

Vietnam's engagement in the ATT negotiations was marked by cautious participation. Although it did not submit an official stance in response to the Secretary-General's invitation, the country made its views known through interventions that echoed similar concerns to other states in the subregion. Vietnam expressed apprehension regarding the inclusion of technology transfer within the ATT's scope (which ultimately was not adopted), fearing that it could adversely affect national development. The country advocated (successfully) for the exclusion of socio-economic development, corruption, and poverty reduction from the Treaty's export assessment criteria, highlighting that these issues are better addressed in separate international processes. Vietnam emphasized the importance of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-intervention in the internal affairs of states, and voiced concerns that the ATT might limit states' access to necessary arms for self-defence and legitimate security needs (Holtom and Parker, 2016).

To this date, Vietnam is neither a state party nor a signatory to the ATT, with no engagement in the CSPs. Nor has it acceded to other conventional arms treaties. Despite this, Vietnam has engaged in dual-use assistance initiatives. The country has also clearly demonstrated that its strict arms control and trade regulations effectively curb illicit proliferation, of both arms and goods, reducing the incentive to join the Treaty.<sup>71</sup> Issues related to cross-border trade outside of ASEAN also raise concerns

with regards to Treaty compliance. Enhancing the country’s capacity to regulate the arms trade is a priority, particularly in light of escalating armed conflicts in the world, and geopolitical tensions in the disputed South China Sea (Hunnicuttt and Bose, 2023; NISEA, 2024).

## East Asia

Different tensions and security concerns characterize the subregion of East Asia—including the volatile situation in the Korean peninsula, competing claims in the South China Sea, and increasing tensions over Taiwan, China. Amid these regional concerns, East Asia is host to significant actors in the global arms trade. These include China, Japan, and South Korea, countries recognized as major arms producers and exporters; Mongolia, mostly an arms importer; and North Korea, which remains isolated and has been subject to a UN embargo since 2006. Within this context, the stance of states in this subregion towards the ATT diverges (see Table 6). China, Japan, and South Korea became states parties to the ATT, aligning with its objectives to regulate the international arms trade. Conversely, Mongolia, despite signing the Treaty in September 2013, has not proceeded to ratification, potentially reflecting hesitations or challenges in aligning its national legislation with the Treaty’s provisions. North Korea notably positioned itself against the Treaty, voting against the resolution during negotiations.

Given the fact that most of the states in the subregion are ATT states parties, outreach efforts toward universalization and compliance in the region have been limited. In recent years, Mongolia benefited from capacity-building efforts aimed at streamlining and strengthening the implementation of the UN PoA and facilitating accession to the ATT. From 2004 onwards, Saferworld also conducted various activities with Chinese partners to raise awareness about the ATT (Saferworld, 2020).<sup>72</sup>

**Table 6** ATT membership in East Asia, as of June 2024

| State       | Status                     | Date                               |
|-------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| China       | State party (accession)    | Entry into force: 4 October 2020   |
| Japan       | State party (acceptance)   | Entry into force: 24 December 2014 |
| South Korea | State party (ratification) | Entry into force: 26 February 2017 |
| Mongolia    | Signatory                  | 24 September 2013                  |
| North Korea | –                          | –                                  |

Source: ATT Secretariat (2024c)

## China

China is one of the major exporters of conventional arms in the region and globally with a 212 per cent increase in sales from 2004–08 to 2009–13 (Wezeman, S.T. and P.D. Wezeman, 2014). It experienced a further 38 per cent growth between 2013 and 2017 (Sharma and Finaud, 2019). This increase underscores China's expanding influence and strategic presence in the arms export domain, especially to countries within the region that receive the main share of these exports (RAND, n.d.).

At the time of the Treaty negotiation, China expressed scepticism about using an international Treaty to control issues related to sovereign defence, as well as reservations about the stringent human rights law regulations due to the subjective nature of judging them, among other concerns (Jalil, 2016). Nevertheless, as the negotiating process unfolded, China dropped its technical objections to the Treaty and chose to abstain from the UNGA vote in 2013 due to the Treaty's inability to secure a consensus (CIP, n.d.; Stavrianakis and Yun, 2014).

In 2020, a few years after the entry into force of the ATT, China acceded to the Treaty, promoting multilateralism and a responsible approach to arms exports (China, 2020). Some commentators argued that the US withdrawal from certain multilateral commitments, including the ATT, also provided China with the opportunity to join the Treaty and other multilateral instruments (Vestner, 2020).<sup>73</sup> Before joining, China already had the Law on the Administration of Firearms and the Regulation on Administration of Military Products Exports, along with its Military Products Export Control List, in place; in October 2020, it promulgated the Export Control Law, which further strengthened the country's legislative system of export control, including military products (China, 2021).

China submitted its initial report, followed by annual reports in 2021–2023, but did not make these available to the public. China has also sent a delegation every year to attend the CSPs, even before acceding to the Treaty, intervening on different occasions. The country has used these platforms to articulate its vision for the arms trade, emphasizing principles such as non-interference, regional peace and stability, and the legitimate self-defence capabilities of recipient nations. China has also emphasized these principles in other fora (China, 2022), underlining certain priorities, including enhancing: the universality and effectiveness of the ATT; the interaction and coordination among relevant mechanisms on conventional arms control in the framework of the UN; and a sense of responsibility in the arms trade. At the time of CSP<sub>10</sub>, China was part of the Management Committee of the VTF.

China highlighted during the ATT process the assistance efforts provided in the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the China–Africa Cooperation Forum, as well as the development of the Global Security Initiative (China, 2023). The country is leading the 'Shenzhen Mode of Controlled Delivery to Combat Firearm

Trafficking via Postal and Courier Channels’, a collaborative effort involving seven countries: Australia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, South Korea, and Vietnam (China, 2024). In February 2024, it presented its national control system during the WGETI meetings (ATT Secretariat, 2024f). China is perceived by some actors in the ATT community as having the potential to become a regional and subregional player in universalization efforts, able to promote more proactive actions to enhance ATT participation in the region (China, 2023).<sup>74</sup> At the time of writing, the country does not seem to have taken up this role yet.

## Japan

Japan’s approach to the arms trade has historically been characterized by stringent export controls and a strong emphasis on peace and security, underpinned by its pacifist constitution. Since the end of the Second World War, the country has maintained a self-imposed arms export ban (ATT Monitor, 2018), which was relaxed in 2014 with the adoption of the ‘Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology’, thus enabling defence equipment and technology to be transferred overseas in very limited and specific cases (Japan, 2014). This shift allowed for a more proactive stance in contributing to peace and stability through the international defence sector, while still maintaining a commitment to non-aggression (Foster, 2023; Yasutomo and Ishigaki, 2017). Furthermore, in 2024 the cabinet of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida approved new guidelines to relax the ‘Three Principles’, ultimately authorizing the export of lethal weapons co-produced by Japan with other countries (*Japan Times*, 2024).

Throughout the ATT negotiations, Japan actively contributed to the Treaty’s development, turning from ‘peace diplomacy’ towards ‘proactive pacifism’. This approach aligned with the guiding principle of Japan’s first National Security Strategy—the ‘Proactive Contribution to Peace’ concept, introduced by the Abe administration in 2013 (Sasaki, 2023; Yasutomo and Ishigaki, 2017). Japan was among the co-sponsors of the first UNGA resolution on an arms trade treaty in 2006. The country’s negotiation strategy emphasized transparency, accountability, and the inclusion of civil society in the treaty-making process. This involvement displayed a strategic shift towards more assertive and normative diplomacy—mediated through a close partnership with civil society actors, particularly Control Arms, the Stimson Center, and SIPRI—as well as a focus on bridging divides between differing state perspectives (Yasutomo and Ishigaki, 2017).

Since becoming a state party to the ATT in 2014, Japan has consistently demonstrated commitment to meeting its obligations under the Treaty. This includes the timely submission of annual reports and active participation in the CSPs. Over the years, Japan has promoted ATT universalization by hosting discussions and referring to roundtable discussions in the region on universalization. As Japan was elected to the presidency

of CSP4, the CSP took place in Tokyo. At CSP5, Japan leveraged its position as co-chair of the WGTU to promote ATT universalization in the Asia-Pacific. It has organized annual roundtables on universalization since then and is part of the VTF Selection Committee from CSP8 to CSP10 (ATT Secretariat, 2024d). Japan has also shown interest in participating in thematic discussions, including on key challenges related to small arms (Japan, 2021). Industries in Japan demonstrated commitment to the Treaty's principles, as shown by the suspension of arms transfers to Israel by the Japanese company Itochu Corporation in February 2024, following an order by the International Court of Justice in relation to Palestinians in Gaza (ICJ, 2024).

## Mongolia

Mongolia's involvement in the global arms trade, particularly in terms of imports, presents a nuanced picture in the context of its broader commitment to international peace and security frameworks. As a country landlocked between two major powers (Russia and China), Mongolia's participation in the arms trade is more aligned with its defence needs than ambitions of expansion or influence. This approach is indicative of Mongolia's balancing act: the need to maintain necessary defence capabilities, while adhering to the principle of military neutrality and supporting international norms promoting stability and peace (Mendee and Soyolgerel, 2022).<sup>75</sup>

During the ATT negotiations, Mongolia demonstrated a commitment to the Treaty's objectives by voting in favour of the ATT draft resolution. Mongolia signed the Treaty in 2013, but demonstrated little engagement in terms of attendance or participation until CSP8. In 2022, Ambassador Davaasuren Gerelmaa underscored Mongolia's dedication to the object and purpose of the ATT, also highlighting the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the nuclear-weapon-free status of Mongolia (Mongolia, 2022).

Mongolia is mostly an importing country, relying primarily on materiel from Russia. This dependency on imports highlights the potential challenges of adhering to the ATT. Ratification of the Treaty is perceived as having implications on imports and national security issues, and as such depends on the positive evaluation of the Treaty by different agencies. Mongolia has also benefited from international support, including outreach and awareness-raising initiatives and a study visit to Romania to learn from its experience. These efforts are timely to avert the risk of Mongolia becoming a transit point for arms and dual-use materiel, and indicate increasing awareness and action towards arms control.<sup>76</sup>

## North Korea

North Korea has been under a UN embargo since 2006 (UNSC, 2006). During the negotiation phase of the ATT, North Korea voiced its opposition. Its objection centred



around the perceived imbalance of the Treaty, favouring arms exporters over importers, and failing to specifically outlaw transfers to rebel and non-state armed groups (Jalil, 2016). This resistance led North Korea to formally object to the adoption of the ATT (alongside Iran and Syria) at the plenary vote of the Final UN Conference on the ATT, preventing a consensus from being reached. This dissatisfaction underscored broader concerns among several major arms trading states, including China, India, and Russia, spotlighting the Treaty's contentious provisions and enforcement challenges (Prizeman, 2013).

As neither a signatory nor a participant in the CSPs over the years, North Korea remains outside the cooperative framework of the ATT. The country's absence appears to align with its broader strategy of leveraging the arms trade as a critical revenue source while maintaining its strategic autonomy, free from international oversight (Lee, J.M., 2023). Such an absence from the ATT framework and its continued flouting of UN sanctions present significant hurdles in mitigating the risks associated with the illicit arms exported from the country, especially to conflict-affected areas (Kim, 2022).

## South Korea

South Korea has rapidly become a significant arms exporter, ranking among the ten largest sellers and experiencing a 74 per cent increase in global arms exports between the periods 2013–17 and 2018–22 (Wezeman, P.D., Gadon, and S.T. Wezeman, 2023). This expansion aligns with South Korea's ambition to cement its status as a leading global defence supplier, fuelled by technological advancements in the domestic defence industry and significant international sales, including to NATO countries amid the Ukraine conflict (Lee and Smith, 2023).

Ahead of its accession to the ATT, South Korea demonstrated commitment to regulating sensitive goods and technologies, aiming to bolster its national security and prevent arms proliferation to regions of concern, such as North Korea. South Korea's implementation of export controls has accelerated since 2007, including with the establishment of the Korea Strategic Trade Institute (ATT Monitor, 2018; Lee, J., 2013). By actively participating in multilateral export control regimes and advocating for a streamlined regulatory framework, including by voting in favour of the ATT during the 2013 UNGA negotiations, South Korea prepared the groundwork for its ratification of the ATT.

Since officially becoming a state party to the ATT in 2017, South Korea has actively engaged with the Treaty's mechanisms, including consistently submitting annual reports available to the public, and participating in and speaking at CSPs. At CSP2, for instance, South Korea highlighted its efforts to revise the Foreign Trade Act and its enforcement ordinance, after successfully completing the necessary amendments of national laws and regulations on conventional arms trade as part of its ratification



Employees work on a howitzer assembly line at an aerospace factory in Changwon, South Korea, 16 March 2023.  
Source: Getty Images/Bloomberg/Woohae Cho

process (South Korea, 2016). Subsequently, South Korea has regularly underlined the need to place a greater emphasis on the humanitarian aspects of the ATT when discussing further substantial issues, universalization activities, and the importance of states' compliance with reporting and financial obligations. Speeches refer to outreach activities in the region, including the 2019 International Export Control Conference held in the country—to which non-signatory countries, export control experts, and the ATT Secretariat were invited—as well as to efforts to translate the Treaty Universalization Toolkit and the 'Welcome Pack' in all ASEAN languages (ATT Secretariat, 2019a; 2024g; South Korea, 2019). South Korea additionally co-chaired the WGTU during the CSP9 and CSP10 cycles and organized an outreach workshop in the ASEAN region in May 2023 in Jakarta, Indonesia, further emphasizing the Asia-Pacific as a priority area for universalization efforts. As South Korea was elected president of the CSP9 in 2023, the selected annual theme focused on enhancing engagement between industry and other key ATT stakeholders to mutually reinforce the implementation of the ATT. Efforts to universalize the ATT within the Asia-Pacific region remain a crucial but challenging ambition, as South Korea seeks to broaden the Treaty's impact amid varying regional security dynamics—including its tense relationship with North Korea, and strategic interests.

## South Asia

South Asia is a subregion characterized by different realities and security concerns, including tensions between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, the risks of arms proliferation from Afghanistan, conflict legacies in Nepal and Sri Lanka, and insecurity within the subregion due to the presence of non-state armed actors. The subregion also has a very low level of Treaty membership (see Table 7), with only one state party (the Maldives, which acceded to the Treaty on 26 December 2019) and one signatory state (Bangladesh). Indeed, India, the largest country in the subregion, abstained at the time of ATT negotiations. For several states in the region, the quest for a more balanced Treaty that accommodates the interests of arms-importing countries reflected broader struggles to navigate the interplay between global arms control efforts and regional security imperatives. Addressing domestic security concerns, compounded by geostrategic sensitivities and historical legacies, seems to complicate accession to the Treaty.

Diverse and sustained efforts to support South Asian countries in acceding to and implementing the ATT have been undertaken over the years, with several international entities playing significant roles. Initiatives such as national awareness and advocacy campaigns, the provision of technical and legal assistance, and capacity-building workshops took place between 2014 and 2023. Funding mechanisms such as UNSCAR also sponsored projects aimed at addressing gun violence and illicit arms trafficking across South Asia, with a particular focus on incorporating a gender perspective (UNODA, 2018). The UNRCPD, which is based in Kathmandu, has also organized workshops and training sessions specifically designed to promote the ATT and support accession efforts, including in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal.<sup>77</sup>

**Table 7** ATT membership in South Asia, as of June 2024

| State      | Status                  | Date                               |
|------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Maldives   | State party (accession) | Entry into force: 26 December 2019 |
| Bangladesh | Signatory               | 26 September 2013                  |
| Bhutan     | –                       | –                                  |
| India      | –                       | –                                  |
| Nepal      | –                       | –                                  |
| Pakistan   | –                       | –                                  |
| Sri Lanka  | –                       | –                                  |

Source: ATT Secretariat (2024c)

## Bangladesh

Bangladesh navigates a distinct global arms trade landscape, primarily characterized by issues surrounding the proliferation of small arms within its borders. Remnants of arms from the 1971 independence war, firearms craft production, and the country's position as a corridor for smuggling firearms have all contributed to the circulation of more than 200,000 small arms, fuelling organized crime and violence (Mustafa, 2005; see Box 1).

Bangladesh demonstrated initial support for the ATT, voting in favour of the ATT resolution and being the first country from the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to sign the Treaty in 2013 (Weiss, 2017). During the negotiations, Bangladesh strongly advocated for the Treaty to cover all types of transfers, and expressed its support for the involvement of CSOs in the entire UN process (Rahman, 2012). Its journey towards ratification has stagnated, however, with a Bangladeshi delegation attending only CSP2 and CSP6. As a signatory state, Bangladesh's engagement with the ATT framework remains tentative, and momentum appears to have passed for several potential reasons, including underlying concerns about regional security dynamics and the Treaty's compatibility with national control standards.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, the country received support from UNRCPD in June 2022, including a combined workshop on both gender-mainstreaming small arms control and drafting a NAP on small arms and light weapons.

The need for mechanisms to address the illicit flow and misuse of small arms within the country's socio-political landscape remains a pressing concern, as does the prevalence of small arms trafficking. Combined with Bangladesh's position as a transit route for small arms trafficking, these issues exacerbate the country's security vulnerabilities. The influence of regional powers further complicates Bangladesh's pathway to full ATT engagement. This can, in part, be attributed to the apparent scepticism about the ATT within the largest power in the subregion, India. Although the Bangladeshi case has not benefited from significant research, some studies have assumed that without India's engagement with the Treaty, advancing the cause of the ATT in the subregion, including in Bangladesh, could present significant challenges (Weiss, 2017). The lack of perceived relevance to the country's military production and imports, coupled with other perceived priority areas, further strengthens the lack of incentive to ratify the Treaty.<sup>79</sup>

## Bhutan

Due to its non-involvement in the production or significant importation of conventional arms, Bhutan's direct interaction with the arms trade is limited. As a small country surrounded by two larger powers, China and India, Bhutan's participation in the arms trade is aligned with the geopolitical landscape of its neighbours. Although

the country is influenced by its principle of gross national happiness, emphasizing peace and non-violence, Bhutan's specific position and involvement in the ATT seem shaped by its diplomatic priorities, including its commitment to maintaining its strategic relationship with neighbouring countries (Kaul, 2022). Bhutan's approach has historically relied on stringent domestic legislation to regulate firearm possession within its territory. The country's principal concern lies in the illicit trade of small arms across its porous borders, a challenge amplified by its proximity to regions affected by such illicit activities (Bhutan, 2016).

While Bhutan has not signed the ATT, its vote in favour of the ATT resolution at the UNGA indicates a positive stance towards international efforts to regulate the arms trade. The country has not, however, engaged directly in CSPs. Nor has it provided official statements in these platforms. In a document provided to the ATT Secretariat in 2016, Bhutan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasized the need for a thorough examination and stakeholder consultation prior to committing to international treaties. Although very little documentation exists on this topic, Bhutan's main challenge in relation to the ATT appears to revolve around balancing its international commitments with domestic capabilities and priorities. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs acknowledged in 2016 that while strong domestic laws are crucial, regional cooperation is also essential to address international problems such as illicit arms (Bhutan, 2016).

## India

India's interaction with the global arms trade is multifaceted, characterized by its role as a significant importer and an emerging exporter of conventional arms. Historically active in disarmament and arms control global policy frameworks, India's policies have evolved, reflecting its rising stature as a global military spender and the necessity for self-reliance in defence production (Oxfam, 2006). Since 2013 India has become part of three multilateral export control regimes focused on preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction: it is one of only three Asian countries (along with Japan and South Korea) to be part of the Wassenaar Arrangement on Export Controls for Conventional Arms and Dual-Use Goods and Technologies, as well as being a member of both the Missile Technology Control Regime and the Australia Group (Sharma and Finaud, 2019).

Despite its active participation in the Treaty's negotiations, India abstained from the UNGA vote to adopt the ATT text, due to concerns regarding the balance of obligations between arms exporting and importing states. India stated that it 'cannot accept that the Treaty be used as an instrument in the hands of exporting states to take unilateral force majeure measures against importing states parties without consequences' (India, 2013). This perceived discriminatory nature of the Treaty, together





Indian Border Security Force women soldiers patrol the Petrapole Border outpost on the India–Bangladesh border, India, 20 October 2019. Source: Getty Images/NurPhoto/Debajyoti Chakraborty

with its perceived lack of effectiveness in curbing the illicit flow of arms to non-state actors, has been a key element in shaping India’s position towards the ATT (Sharma and Finaud, 2019).

India’s reasoning for abstaining from committing to the ATT has remained consistent. Although neither a state party nor a signatory to the Treaty, India amended its Indian Arms Act (1959) in 2019, improving controls and categorization of firearms and ammunition in the country (India, 2024). It also enacted control and enforcement measures, including the use of end-user certificates (Kanwal, 2013). During Sri Lanka’s conflict with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), India declined to provide the country with offensive weaponry, despite Sri Lanka’s requests and the risk of losing arms exports to China or Pakistan, supplying only defensive equipment such as air defence guns and radars (Kanwal, 2013).

India faces several challenges in navigating the ATT landscape, including addressing the illicit proliferation of small arms within the subregion, managing its strained relationships with neighbouring countries such as Pakistan and China amid ongoing security tensions, and aligning its defence industry ambitions with international arms trade norms. India’s stance, however, also has implications for neighbouring smaller states, such as Bangladesh and Nepal, which are among the primary purchasers of Indian defence equipment (Sharma and Finaud, 2019).<sup>80</sup>

## Maldives

The Maldives' involvement in the arms trade remains limited, as the country imports weapons—primarily small arms—for defence purposes and has sporadic transfers.<sup>81</sup> In 2015 concerns were raised within the country about the rise in terrorist attacks following a government arms deal for a private armoury, which underscored the perceived need for greater regulation and transparency in arms dealings (Maldives Independent, 2015).

During the ATT negotiations, the Maldives voted in favour of the Treaty. The country's subsequent actions, particularly its accession to the ATT in 2019, marked a significant step in its commitment to global arms trade regulation. Since accession, the Maldives has submitted its annual reports in line with ATT requirements, although these reports, apart from that of 2021, are generally not publicly accessible.<sup>82</sup> The Maldives' consistent participation in CSP7, CSP8, and CSP9 demonstrates its engagement and support for the Treaty's objectives.

The country already had a solid control system in place before joining the Treaty.<sup>83</sup> The Maldives has continued to maintain and strengthen its compliance and engagement with the ATT, amid broader security concerns and despite the costs entailed by ATT participation. In February 2024, the Maldives spoke on behalf of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and in national capacity during the CSP10 Working Group meeting debate on 'Current and Emerging Implementation Issues', related to the 2023–24 war in Gaza. The country also spoke during the virtual informal consultations on 'Upholding Legal Obligations Under the ATT: The Case of the Palestinian People' (Varella, 2024).

## Nepal

Nepal's involvement in the global arms trade is centred around imports, mostly relying on support from India, based on the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship, and other countries such as the United States.<sup>84</sup> In its history, Nepal has experienced the destabilizing impact of small arms, primarily due to historical insurgency movements, such as the Maoist rebellion, compounded by criminal activities as well as the use of small arms by some 'local and national elites' (Mustafa, 2005; Paudel, 2014). The enduring impact of the Maoist rebellion, inadequate coordination between Nepal's and India's security agencies along the open border, the low cost of firearms, and the rise of both armed groups and political instability are the reasons behind the use of small arms in the country (Bogati, 2014).

During the ATT negotiations, Nepal voted in favour of the Treaty. The subsequent steps taken by the government, in collaboration with civil society and international partners, to promote Nepal's accession to the Treaty, indicate a constructive engagement with

the Treaty's objectives. Despite being neither a state party nor a signatory to the Treaty, Nepal has shown interest in the ATT through capacity-building workshops, including discussions on themes related to gender and small arms under the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda.<sup>85</sup> It has not, however, attended any CSPs. KIIs conducted with national stakeholders highlighted challenges that are also common to some other states in the subregion, such as a lack of financial and technical assistance, capacity, and expertise, as well as the need to maintain momentum around the Treaty (Control Arms, 2018).<sup>86</sup> At the national level, progress on the ATT and other conventional arms control issues is currently stalled in parliament. In 2024, these topics were awaiting parliamentary debate, which was contingent on the passage of the Transitional Justice Bill—one of the most significant milestones of the peace agreement.<sup>87</sup> Additionally, the country's efforts towards accession are complicated by regional considerations, particularly the dynamics with neighbouring arms suppliers such as India.

## Pakistan

Pakistan is one of the major importers of conventional arms and small arms in the subregion, although not a significant exporter of conventional arms. Pakistan is nevertheless one of the states in the subregion most affected by the proliferation of small arms. This is in large part due to its location next to Afghanistan, where historical geopolitical events such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan contributed to an influx of arms into the region, and the withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan in 2021 has given rise to further arms trafficking under the Taliban (Fleischner, 2023). The domestic craft arms industry, particularly in areas such as Darra Adam Khel, further complicates control efforts due to its historical and cultural entrenchment and substantial provision of employment. Efforts by the Government of Pakistan to control illicit arms flows highlight an ongoing struggle against local economies dependent on the gun industry, exacerbated by socio-political divides (Hashim, 2019). Concerns of smuggling in border areas with Afghanistan remain high, due to the number of seizures near the Pakistani border and the rise in attacks by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, mainly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, operating from Afghan soil (Fleischner, 2023).

During the ATT negotiations, Pakistan expressed support for the basic principles underlying the Treaty, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach that addresses both the supply and demand aspects of the arms trade. Pakistan's concerns over the Treaty's perceived bias towards arms-exporting countries over importing ones illustrates the country's apprehensions regarding the equitable distribution of obligations and the potential misuse of Treaty provisions to disadvantage arms-importing states. Additionally, Pakistan's position related to the Treaty's unbalanced nature was further emphasized by the Treaty's failure to establish any mechanisms for accountability in case an arms-exporting country violates its terms (Jalil, 2016). This contributed to Pakistan's hesitancy due to perceived risks of destabilizing accumulations of arms,



as well as scepticism about the ATT threshold not being complied with by exporting states parties.<sup>88</sup> These reservations underline Pakistan's cautious stance, seeking to ensure that international arms control measures do not inadvertently compromise security needs or sovereignty. Despite voting in favour of the Treaty's adoption in 2013 and in the First Committee votes between 2019 and 2023, Pakistan has not joined the ATT. Nevertheless, unlike other non-states parties to the Treaty in the sub-region, Pakistan has attended two CSPs: CSP2 and CSP9. The country maintains a national control system, which includes licence-issuing authorities, and procedures for providing opinions on licences, although some further legislative steps may be needed in case of future accession to the Treaty.<sup>89</sup>

## Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's interaction with the global arms trade remains blurred, as the country has only submitted four reports to UNROCA between 1992 and 1995. The proliferation and circulation of small arms in the country are deeply rooted in its prolonged internal conflict. The conflict with the LTTE not only led to a substantial loss of life, but also entrenched a culture of militarization, facilitated by both the theft of government weapons by insurgent groups and illicit trafficking (Gorea, 2006). Politicians maintaining private armies for electoral success, coupled with porous maritime borders that facilitate the smuggling of arms, further complicated the security landscape (Mustafa, 2005). Between 2008 and 2016, the United States imposed an arms embargo on the country due to human rights violations by the Sri Lankan armed forces in the concluding stage of the Eelam War (Jelvin and Reghunathan Nair, 2021).<sup>90</sup> Instability persists in the country, as testified for instance by the political unrest of 2022 and a series of Islamic State-related attacks that killed a total of 269 people in April 2019 (BBC News, 2020).

While the specific stance of Sri Lanka during the ATT negotiations phase was not made public, the post-conflict efforts and legislative steps taken by the Sri Lankan government indicate a difficult relationship with arms control initiatives. As Sri Lanka abstained from the vote on the ATT in 2013, the strategic interplay with major powers, notably China's support through military aid amid Western sanctions during the Eelam War and subsequent engagement with the Belt and Road Initiative, suggests the careful navigation of international norms for the purposes of geopolitical advancement and survival amid sanctions and global scrutiny. In the last decade, Sri Lanka has acceded to the Mine Ban Convention and the CCM.

The country remains outside the ATT framework and absent from CSPs. For Sri Lanka, the enduring legacy of arms proliferation from the civil war era, alongside the need for robust mechanisms to prevent illicit trafficking, demands an effective implementation of legislation frameworks (Foster and Abeywardana, 2006). Nonetheless, some

activities have been promoted to tackle illicit arms proliferation, suggesting some indirect, tentative alignments with the Treaty's objectives. For instance, Sri Lanka's members of parliament Nimal Siripala de Silva and Thilanga Sumathipala have been supportive of promoting the Treaty through the Parliamentarians for Global Action (Abhayagunawardena, 2018). Likewise, in 2024, UNRCPD supported a series of activities, requested by the Sri Lankan police and conducted in partnership with the Mines Advisory Group, aimed at enhancing the Sri Lankan police's capacity for the safe and secure accounting, storage, transportation, and handling of state-held weapons (UNODA, 2024b). ●



While a number of states have shown interest in engaging or complying with the Treaty, some consider universalization or national implementation a secondary priority compared to other domestic concerns.”

## **ATT universalization and compliance: challenges and way forward**

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This section examines and summarizes the key challenges that hinder ATT universalization and compliance in the Indo-Pacific region, and suggests some potential entry points for further engagement and cooperation to strengthen the effectiveness of the ATT in the Indo-Pacific.

## Main challenges to ATT universalization and compliance

The Indo-Pacific region occupies a strategic position in the global arms trade, influenced by its current geopolitical significance, diverse security challenges, and economic development. The region has witnessed numerous conflicts, ranging from anti-colonial struggles and world wars to the current shifts in global political dynamics—including the rise of emerging global powers such as China, India, and Russia (Lodgaard, 2023; NISEA, 2024).

In this context, the general attitudes of states in the region towards the ATT range from support to concern, with the latter centred in particular around protecting national sovereignty and building national defence capacities. Most of the challenges to ATT universalization and compliance faced by the region's states identified in this Report echo those of previous studies—including competing internal priorities, geopolitical influences, security concerns, and limited capacity.<sup>91</sup> This indicates that some issues and reservations have persisted over the years, despite the efforts of several international, regional, and non-governmental actors to overcome them.

## Domestic reservations and scepticism towards aspects of the ATT impeding universalization

States in the Indo-Pacific region, including some currently in the process of reform and modernization, have voiced concerns about how the ATT might affect their developing defence industry and imports for national security purposes.

For instance, the Treaty faces scepticism from some states due to a sentiment that it could infringe upon their national sovereign right to regulate their arms trade, and is perceived as a threat to both self-defence (for example, the capacity to import arms for national security goals) and economic interests (such as commercial benefits). In some cases, concerns about the ability to ensure a state's self-defence stem from an initial disagreement during negotiations, persisting to this day, closely related to the divide between arms-importing and arms-exporting states. At the time of negotiations, states such as India and Pakistan voiced concerns that the Treaty did not adequately balance these responsibilities, suggesting that it inherently favours the exporting countries (India, 2013; Jalil, 2016). These concerns may still influence the judgement and approach of some states.<sup>92</sup>

In relation to the ATT being perceived as a threat to economic interests, Singapore, for example, has consistently reiterated this concern at CSPs: '[W]e firmly believe that every State has the sovereign right to acquire conventional arms to exercise its right to self-defence, and we cannot disregard states' legitimate interests in this regard. We must therefore strike a fine balance between fulfilling our obligations pursuant to the ATT and enabling legitimate international trade in conventional arms' (Singapore, 2023). Closely related to some states' economic strategies and commercial interests, this may also be a concern for states seeking to expand their defence exports (Sharma and Finaud, 2019).<sup>93</sup>

The Treaty's exclusion of provisions concerning arms transfers to non-state actors at the time of negotiations also remains a contentious issue. The reluctance to incorporate regulations on arms transfers to non-state actors, for instance, by India and Indonesia (Sharma and Finaud, 2019), emphasizes the difficulties in achieving consensus on some issues. This limitation gives rise to further criticism, as the Treaty may be perceived as failing to adequately address all key aspects of the global arms trade.<sup>94</sup>

Currently, some states' scepticism of the Treaty remains significant, as the Treaty is perceived to have not yet demonstrated its impact on both illicit and licit trade that has contributed to tensions within the region and beyond. Some states in the region may perceive the Treaty as not fair or comprehensive enough and focused on the concerns of Western states. These perceptions have, at least in some senses, accumulated in negative attitudes towards the ATT. For example, discussions during the ATT Working Group meetings in February 2024 showed that some states parties even feel that the Treaty has yet to demonstrate its ability to stop transfers from states parties that contribute to human suffering, such as transfers to Israel during the 2023–24 war in Gaza.<sup>95</sup> Additionally, some states would consider the inclusion of provisions on non-state armed actors particularly important given emerging concerns about the role of private military companies.<sup>96</sup>

## **Need to build and support political momentum towards ratification and compliance, and increase awareness of aspects of the Treaty**

The absence of a robust regional coordination mechanism could also constitute a challenge to Treaty universalization and implementation in the region (Varisco, Maletta, and Robin, 2021).<sup>97</sup> The varying levels of engagement among regional entities such as the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), SAARC, and ASEAN, with some perceived as less active players in arms control, highlight a limited environment for supporting universalization and implementation of the ATT. At the subregional level, initiatives such as the 2023 ASEAN Declaration on Combating Arms Smuggling, the ASEAN framework

to combat transnational crime, and the Regional Roadmap on Weapons Regulations are positive attempts to have regional mechanisms addressing weapons in South-East Asia.

These concerns also go along with the tendency for the initial enthusiasm that often accompanies the introduction of international conventions such as the ATT to wane over time. This poses an additional challenge for maintaining political momentum towards both ratification and compliance as national governments and priorities change. According to various stakeholders consulted, the excitement that marked the Treaty's inception has diminished, shifting attention to other concerning issues or emerging initiatives.<sup>98</sup>

For some states in the region, the path towards ratification of the ATT has proved to be tortuous. Some states showed interest and alignment with the Treaty by signing it more than ten years ago, but, at the time of writing, have yet to ratify it, despite the provision of outreach and assistance activities aimed at achieving this goal. These activities have often engaged with different actors and tried to increase awareness on different aspects or articles of the Treaty that could have been perceived as unclear or potentially problematic (for example, brokering), and have given states opportunities to learn from the experiences of others.

Despite efforts to overcome barriers to access materials and other types of support, challenges remain. The translation of the Treaty Universalization Toolkit and the 'Welcome Pack' for new states parties to the ATT into languages from the region is one example of these efforts (ATT Secretariat, 2019a; 2024g). The availability of cooperation and assistance has also been stressed. The fact that the VTF is only open to applications from states,<sup>99</sup> however, as well as its application process requirements, might have limited states' ability to secure necessary support (Maletta and Bauer, 2021; Varisco, Maletta, and Robin, 2021, pp. 43–51).<sup>100</sup> In addition, some interviews highlighted a common concern: outreach efforts may have only included limited engagement with CSOs from the region, which in some cases was also due to CSOs' limited access to already constrained international funding. This marginal involvement and the scarcity of sustained funding for comprehensive studies and awareness-raising activities underscore the need for simplified processes, broader consultations, and enhanced resources to bolster the Treaty's understanding and uptake among major stakeholders, including parliamentarians and senior staff in security institutions.

It also shows the importance of assessing the outcomes of the funded initiatives and of monitoring, evaluation, and learning. In this context, women's meaningful participation in the CSO framework is also lacking in some subregions, particularly in national discussions of arms issues. This can make it difficult for CSOs working on gender equality to be part of these discussions at the national level, and, consequently, to join the regional and global debate. Some efforts have been undertaken in this



Participants in discussion at the Workshop for South-east Asia on Gun Violence and Illicit Small Arms Trafficking from a Gender Perspective organized by UNRCPD in Bangkok, Thailand, July 2018.

Source: UNRCPD

respect, including initiatives on gender perspectives on armed violence and small arms trafficking in the Asia-Pacific area (UNRCPD, 2020a). Regional events to foster gender-responsive arms control, particularly in relation to the UN PoA and the ATT, have also made positive contributions (UNIDIR and UNRCPD, 2024).

## Regional security concerns and geopolitical influences amid universalization

Security considerations also impact the perspectives of Indo-Pacific states on the ATT, particularly in a region characterized by historic rivalries and geopolitical tensions. India's reluctance to join the ATT, for example, is partly rooted in apprehensions regarding China's growing arms export industry and its implications for India's domestic and regional security environment. These apprehensions are heightened by the threat of non-state armed groups, as well as the illicit arms trade facilitated by non-state actors. Other tensions, such as those between Pakistan and India, or Vietnam and China, also contribute to shaping states' attitudes towards the Treaty (Sharma and Finaud, 2019). The lack of trust between prominent regional powers, accentuated by historical conflicts and strategic contentions in key maritime domains, fuels national

arms build-ups and enhances scepticism towards instruments like the ATT, which can be perceived to constrain national defence preparation (Lee, J., 2023).

The South China Sea disputes offer another example of regional security concerns that involve multiple states (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam). As one study noted, ‘although not the primary driver of increasing arms imports, opposition against China’s territorial claims has increased the demand for weapons importation over the last five years, along with defence modernization and assertions of sovereignty’ (Austero and Gorospe, 2019). This issue also affects the public perception of national security threats, a topic covered regularly in the region’s newspapers and a contributing factor in ensuring that military modernization is part of the national agenda (NISEA, 2024).

Nevertheless, some see the accession of global powers such as China to the ATT as something that could help shift the regional security calculus, provided current tensions lessen.<sup>101</sup> The hesitancy of smaller nations—for instance, that of certain countries in South Asia weighing the implications of India’s potential reaction to their ratification—illustrates how bilateral relations could significantly influence decisions regarding Treaty engagement. Similarly, the broader regional outlook, where countries may be willing to join the ATT contingent following the participation of neighbouring leading states, may illustrate how targeting influential states for ATT universalization could catalyse broader regional acceptance.

## Limited capacity and financial resources, and bureaucratic hurdles

Some Indo-Pacific states take a stricter, more cautious approach to their international obligations to ensure their national control systems and practices fully comply with the obligations of the Treaty before becoming states parties. This implies that some states from the region, even if they are not yet states parties to the Treaty, have regulations and a national control system in place. This approach may, however, result in some Indo-Pacific states facing challenges and significant internal legislative and procedural obstacles that impede their ability to join or comply with the ATT. The process of drafting legislative amendments and establishing new regulations demonstrates the time-consuming nature of aligning national laws with ATT obligations (Varisco, Maletta, and Robin, 2021), as experienced by some countries in the region. Similarly, the procedural and bureaucratic hurdles within internal mechanisms may slow down the pace towards ratification of the ATT, further hindered by the complexities of inter-departmental cooperation and the frequent bureaucratic rotations that disrupt continuity and institutional memory. For instance, CSOs that have approached some of the Indo-Pacific states highlight the lack of an established coordination mechanism or point of contact for arms issues, thereby complicating engagement efficiency (ATT BAP, 2017).



These challenges thus encompass a wide array of issues, including insufficient human resources, a lack of regular training for new officials to ensure that efforts are sustainable in the event of turnover, decentralized record-keeping, and a breakdown in communication between UN permanent missions and capitals. In this regard, the costs associated with international engagement, including the expenses tied to attending Geneva-based discussions, further highlight the difficulties faced by some states. It should be noted, however, that the Sponsorship Programme, put in place by the ATT Secretariat to address this type of issue, has sponsored several states from Asia and Oceania over the years. In 2024, for instance, 11 states from Asia and three states from Oceania were sponsored to attend CSP10 (ATT Secretariat, 2024h).

The reporting requirements of several instruments, coupled with the lack of coordination and information sharing among government ministries and agencies, continue to place an added strain on the resource-constrained states parties in the region. Reporting requirements present significant challenges for states in terms of ATT compliance, including the need to overcome poor inter-agency collaboration (ATT Secretariat, 2024a; Holtom and Bromley, 2011). This not only affects state compliance with ATT reporting requirements, but also represents an obstacle to joining the Treaty. At times, states or interested stakeholders lack awareness about reporting obligations—despite extensive efforts by the Working Group on Transparency and Reporting (WGTR) and CSOs to address this. This issue, coupled with a culture of secrecy within agencies tasked with holding pertinent information, exacerbates challenges to reporting.

Reporting fatigue, uncertainties about the relevance of reporting for specific states, and the absence of clear benchmarks or success indicators related to implementation further complicate compliance efforts (ATT BAP, 2017; Holtom and Bromley, 2011). In Bangladesh, for example, researchers observed that ‘being a developing country with funding constraints and with an overstressed bureaucracy, another reporting mechanism under the ATT would not only be difficult for Bangladesh but to some extent the country may not be able to fulfil this requirement without international assistance’ (Rahman, 2012). Such obligations may therefore be perceived as requiring significant time and effort for states, and could sway non-states parties towards scepticism about acceding to the Treaty. It should be noted, however, that the WGTR has worked to address these problems. Since 2021, for example, states can use the data from the ATT annual report as the basis for submissions to UNROCA by simply ticking a box in the ATT reporting template (Wezeman, S.T., George, and P.D. Wezeman, 2024).

## **Competing national priorities and lack of political will in universalization and compliance efforts**

Challenges to universalization and prioritization of the ATT within the Indo-Pacific region also stem from conflicting and competing priorities. This results in a lack of

political will to accede or comply with the Treaty (Varisco, Maletta, and Robin, 2021). This stance is shared by various countries in the region, where the perceived benefits of joining the ATT are overshadowed by concerns over ATT obligations. States may have a clear understanding of what the ATT entails in terms of requirements and ‘costs’ (such as reporting obligations, attendance at the meetings, and annual fees), but less clarity on the benefits that joining the ATT can bring, particularly for states that already have strict laws on weapons and control of arms transfers.<sup>102</sup>

The resulting reluctance can be also partly attributed to the perception that the Treaty imposes conditionalities that contravene domestic laws, a concern voiced by Indonesia in 2018 (Santi and Manan, 2018; Sharma and Finaud, 2019, p. 6). While a number of states have shown interest in engaging or complying with the Treaty, some consider universalization or national implementation a secondary priority compared to other domestic concerns, such as internal armed conflict, migration and refugees, tensions in contested land and sea borders, national development, and climate vulnerability (NISEA, 2024). Some countries in Oceania, for instance, may not see the ATT as a key issue in their list of political priorities due to the limited arms trade in their country, and instead focus on climate change as their main political priority. As such, in some states the ATT is less of a priority compared to other more pressing and higher priority issues, which may fall under the mandate of the same overburdened agencies or officials. Such reservations are amplified against the backdrop of an existing geopolitical climate that creates apprehension towards international legal frameworks, alongside the perception of limited compliance.

## Entry points and opportunities

Despite the difficulties in achieving universalization and compliance, there are some possible, concrete entry points for further engagement and cooperation with the region that would strengthen the effectiveness of the ATT and those goals in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>103</sup> These possible measures are intended to support and complement the efforts of different actors—the WGTU, the ATT Secretariat, national agencies, and CSOs—engaged in ATT universalization and compliance, including the proposal on ‘Enhancing the Work of the ATT WGTU’ endorsed at CSP9 (ATT Secretariat, 2023a; 2023b) and the WGTU work plan for ATT universalization efforts under review (ATT Secretariat, 2024g).

## Universalization

In defining a strategy towards universalization of the Treaty, the CSP and the WGTU called in 2023 for a focus ‘primarily on Signatory States as they have already demonstrated political commitment to the Treaty, while remaining open and engaged with

other states interested in joining the Treaty at any time, as well as taking into account developments relevant to the objectives of the Treaty' (ATT Secretariat, 2023b). This was combined with discussions on regions where possible universalization efforts should focus during a multi-year work plan, which identified Asian-Pacific states that have not yet joined the Treaty as the primary focus for the CSP<sub>11</sub> to CSP<sub>13</sub> cycles. Some delegations also mentioned that the WGTU should 'remain involved with the major exporters and importers that are not yet a State Party, as well as take strategic interests into consideration, such as the potential contribution to combating organized crime' (ATT Secretariat, 2024g, para. 16). Discussions have thus far, however, placed more emphasis on adopting a geographical focus rather than prioritizing states that have prominent roles in the arms trade, whether as major exporters or importers of conventional arms.

Possible measures and entry points to meet universalization challenges include the following:

- **Actors engaged in ATT universalization efforts (that is, the WGTU, the ATT Secretariat, national agencies, regional organizations where active, and CSOs) should concentrate in the short term on states that have demonstrated a preliminary inclination and willingness to join the Treaty, despite facing considerable challenges.**

In line with the proposal on enhancing the work of the ATT WGTU and its work plan, these states include signatory states that have demonstrated commitment and political interest towards the Treaty, as well as non-states parties that voted in favour of adopting the ATT in 2013 and support ATT resolutions in the UNGA. For those states, targeted efforts could include the following: undertaking an assessment of the obstacles to ratification/accession; helping states to conduct a national self-assessment of their laws and how these are, or are not, compliant with the ATT (this would also include acknowledging countries that already have robust national legislation and export controls in place, to emphasize their responsible arms trade practices); conducting a comprehensive gap analysis at the national level; developing a national roadmap or strategy towards Treaty ratification and accession; providing updated guides and materials on the ATT; and supporting activities (such as awareness-raising or other activities) to re-establish or reinforce momentum towards ATT ratification and accession. These are all activities that can be funded through mechanisms such as the VTF.

In parallel, the same actors engaged in universalization efforts, and particularly exporting states parties from the region, could develop targeted strategies to engage non-states parties. This process may include the following: 1) holding outreach activities to understand and address specific concerns (such as fears that the ATT may limit a country's capacity to import arms) and build consensus and support for the ATT; 2) inviting countries to participate as observers in ATT Working Groups and CSPs;<sup>104</sup> and 3) monitoring and adapting strategies based on voting



A member of the Karenni Nationalities Defence Force shows a rifle partly made with 3D-printed components in Kayah State, Myanmar, 20 February 2023. Source: Getty Images/LightRocket/Thierry Falise

records in ATT resolutions in the UNGA. This would involve targeting countries that have reservations, working towards consensus building, acknowledging positive shifts, and engaging with countries whose attitudes have shifted from positive to negative.

- **Donors and states parties, especially exporting states, should support efforts to establish a stronger evidence base for the broader security challenges that states face in considering joining the ATT, and develop strategies for addressing these.**

In some national contexts, broader or subregional security-related considerations may determine and affect the attitude of a state towards the ATT. Political actors, such as defence ministries, may fear that joining the ATT could limit the country's ability to import arms, or have implications on national security. Other national stakeholders, including industry or members of parliament, may be sceptical that certain specific Treaty obligations, such as reporting, could disclose information about national capacities or a state's imports.

In some circumstances, data and information on illicit flows of arms and security challenges is difficult to obtain. Donors should consider providing specific funding to CSOs, research institutes, and national law enforcement authorities to improve the evidence base on illicit arms flows through more systematic monitor-

ing of those flows. In other circumstances, states perceive that the Treaty does not sufficiently address these security threats, or could limit states' imports. In these cases, states parties, especially exporting states, would need to engage more in Working Group meetings and other fora to demonstrate how they are taking these concerns seriously and how the ATT as a mechanism has improved decision-making on exports in a way that future members could benefit from. This would also involve demonstrating to reluctant importing states the possible benefits that membership in the ATT could bring to them.

Engaging in constant dialogue with security institutions and promoting the role that the Treaty can play in providing a global platform to tackle these problems are additional practical activities to build confidence that the ATT is fit for purpose. Other complementary activities that donors can sponsor could include undertaking comprehensive subregional studies to analyse and understand countries and subregional realities, and developing ad hoc training courses and programmes on the ATT, or dedicated training packages in relevant languages, that target ministries of defence or other reluctant actors. These can also include experiences from military or defence colleagues from other states. In this regard, engagement tailored to national circumstances would be useful, given the diverse challenges and contexts within the Indo-Pacific region: outreach initiatives should consider unique security concerns, regional dynamics, and conflicts—emphasizing the specific benefits of the ATT for each state, as well as its complementarity with other instruments.

- **Efforts should be made to deepen understanding of the different dimensions characterizing the arms trade in the region—particularly maritime and brokering aspects of the arms trade—and of the capacity gaps or needs that must be addressed to improve control over illicit arms trade.**

Some challenges related to the maritime security dimension of the trade are common across the region, as are some of the capacity gaps and needs required to improve control over the illicit trade of arms. In 2017, for example, many states in Oceania highlighted a lack of adequate X-ray machines at border posts as a practical and common challenge (ATT BAP, 2017).

In relation to brokering, some cases presented in this Report demonstrate how brokering activities take place in some parts of the region. Some countries in the Indo-Pacific region remain at the centre of the arms trade, while others are working to reinforce their legislation on arms brokering. Article 10 of the ATT regulates brokering in the context of the Treaty. In contrast to Articles 5, 6, 7, 9, and 11, however, to date WGETI has never established a dedicated sub-working group on brokering. While the creation of such a group may not be feasible, the Draft Multi-year Work Plan for the WGETI Sub-Working Group on Exchange of National Implementation Practices (ATT Secretariat, 2024f) envisages a future three-hour session on brokering. It is vital that experts from states parties are able to share

ideas and propose effective solutions that have been or could be implemented within the framework of the ATT, and that states still outside the Treaty would be able to participate in such discussions. Donors could support the design and implementation of dedicated courses led by different national experts from countries that have developed good practices for the effective regulation of arms brokering, also involving law enforcement officials and authorities at the national and subregional level. These courses would aim to deepen understanding of these realities and risks, enable the exchange of information on such risks with other countries, and explore ways in which the ATT can constitute a valid platform for regulating these aspects of the arms trade. Similar courses, including online versions, have already been promoted in the past, and have provided an excellent platform for interested states and stakeholders from the region.<sup>105</sup>

- **Actors engaged in ATT universalization efforts (such as the WGTU, the ATT Secretariat, national agencies, regional organizations where active, and CSOs) should promote inter-agency cooperation from the outset of national considerations of the ATT through Treaty implementation processes.**

Inter-agency cooperation is a fundamental aspect to consider for universalization and effective implementation of the Treaty (ATT Secretariat, 2024a). By bringing together key ministries, law enforcement agencies, and other relevant bodies, inter-agency coordination facilitates the exchange of information, expertise, and resources, ultimately strengthening a country's capacity to accede to the Treaty and fulfil its obligations. Different countries in the Indo-Pacific region have made efforts in this regard.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, several obligations of the Treaty—such as establishing a national control system, assessing the risk of arms transfers to different end users, or providing reports and information on arms transfers—often involve more than one agency or ministry at the national level (Holtom, 2024). Thus, building and reinforcing inter-agency cooperation mechanisms is fundamental to elicit interest and participation of different actors in the process, to address the reservations that some agencies may have about the Treaty, and to facilitate the internal process of ratification or accession and implementation. Measures in this area could include the following: 1) the continued implementation of outreach activities and meetings targeting different national actors; 2) the creation of memos by national CSOs for different ministries highlighting the potential benefits of the Treaty for each of them (Spano and Alpers, 2017a); and 3) for states willing to join the Treaty, the development of a joint roadmap towards the Treaty, with a leading agency with the involvement of all national agencies and stakeholders, including CSOs that could help maintain momentum in the event of changes of government. The VTF and the EU ATT Outreach Programme, among others, can provide financial support for these activities. Such activities and engagement can help overcome doubts and reservations about the Treaty that some agencies and ministries may have.

- **The WGETI and actors implementing outreach activities should continue to share the experiences and ‘lessons learned’ of states that are fully part of the ATT to increase understanding of how to overcome challenges to universalization and compliance.**

KIIs highlighted the importance of sharing lessons learned from other countries to shed light on possible common challenges, and to provide signatory and non-states parties with the opportunity to learn from the experience of other states in order to overcome their own challenges to universalization and compliance. This sharing of experiences is already taking place. For example, the Philippines benefited from several outreach activities, including a visit to Rotterdam Port, prior to ratification. The Philippines also participated in March 2024 in a BAFA outreach event in Thailand to present their roadmap to ratification to Thai national authorities. Implementers of outreach activities can continue to organize side events that allow partner states to share experiences and best practices, as this can offer states that are planning to join the ATT guidance on ways to strengthen domestic measures and on possible assistance activities available to help countries access the Treaty.

CSP9 decisions have proposed more alignment between the work of the WGTU and the mainstream work of the WGETI, through structured discussions on the implementation stage of ‘ATT ratification or accession and domestication’. The new WGETI Sub-working Group on Exchange of National Implementation Practices provides an opportunity to increase such exchanges. These exchanges would benefit not only states parties, but first and foremost signatory states and non-states parties, which could also attend ATT meetings. One measure supporting the new focus of the WGETI would be to share states’ presentations in advance of the meetings, to allow other states’ representatives sufficient time to read them and prepare follow-up questions during the working groups.

Such initiatives would allow states to share their national experiences and to learn how to overcome similar challenges to universalization and compliance. The ATT Secretariat could also consider the development of an ad hoc repository of states’ experiences on the ATT website, where presentations from the Working Group meetings (both PowerPoint presentations and videos) can be collected and shared publicly.<sup>107</sup>

- **Donors and actors engaged in ATT universalization efforts (such as the WGTU, the ATT Secretariat, national agencies, regional organizations where active) should foster subregional processes aimed at overcoming states’ doubts and fears.**

It is always tempting to propose, support, or identify common regional or sub-regional views and collective processes. In the Indo-Pacific region, these regional processes and views do not exist in all subregions. The South-east Asia sub-region has, however, recently made important steps towards promoting regional



understanding and processes in the field of arms. For example, the newly adopted ASEAN Declaration on Combating Arms Smuggling (ASEAN, 2023) is an initial regional effort to establish a regional mechanism addressing weapons. Other existing dynamics and cooperative mechanisms include the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime and the Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime. Similarly, the Philippines is championing a Regional Roadmap on Weapons Regulations, an informal platform open to states from ASEAN as well as to states from South Asia and Oceania (Philippines, 2024).

Subregional processes have also emerged in the past in Oceania, through for instance the Boe Declaration, the Nadi Framework, the model law to assist Pacific states in implementing the ATT, and previous activities of the PIF. Such subregional processes can provide a platform to exchange experiences and reflect on common security-related challenges. Subregional conferences on the ATT, organized by UNRCPD or subregional fora (such as the PIF in Oceania) and states, and involving local and international CSOs, can provide an opportunity to increase momentum towards Treaty ratification at the subregional level and to reinforce states' efforts towards ATT compliance. In some circumstances, they could ensure greater participation in discussions for states with similar concerns, such as those of importing states, and suggest measures to address these. States parties should also include the ATT in conversations about other arms control instruments at the regional, subregional, and national levels, or in bilateral exchanges. This can increase awareness of the Treaty, given past and ongoing efforts in the region on other arms control instruments and the existence of regional initiatives such as the yearly Asian Export Control Seminar hosted in Japan since 1993.

## Compliance

Possible measures and entry points to meet compliance challenges include the following:

- **States parties and other ATT stakeholders should focus efforts on those states that face challenges in meeting Treaty implementation obligations.**

Treaty obligations include arms transfers control obligations (establishing a national control system, including a national control list, and regulating transfers); reporting obligations (submitting initial and annual reports); and financial obligations (ATT Secretariat, 2019a). Attendance at meetings can also be challenging, particularly for states that have limited resources, are located far from Europe, and may have a small diplomatic presence in Geneva. International cooperation and assistance efforts should continue to support states that have experienced some implementation challenges. The ATT Secretariat should continue



to support states' attendance through the Sponsorship Programme. Assistance activities such as the national reporting clinic and the clinic on establishing a national control system under the ATT, organized by Control Arms on the margins of CSP9, also help states to overcome compliance challenges (Control Arms, 2023; Control Arms and Stimson Center, 2023). In addition, states could develop a road-map for implementation to assess progress in fulfilling Treaty obligations and to help them articulate their need for assistance and the type of assistance required. The WGETI should also consider the identification and use of 'regional champions' (a role already identified in relation to the WGTU strategy) to support individual governments' implementation challenges.

- **States parties and other ATT stakeholders should focus in particular on inter-agency mechanisms.**

This measure is linked to inter-agency cooperation and requires building national implementation mechanisms that are both inclusive and sustainable over time. This is vital for effective compliance, particularly given the importance of inter-agency cooperation to ensure effective implementation at the national level, and the high turnover of government officials. Promoting an active and constant exchange of information among different agencies at the national level (and, possibly, already from the universalization process) could be a first step towards improving inter-agency cooperation over time.

As states' priorities may change for a variety of reasons over time, measures to maintain political commitment and ensure continued compliance are useful. Such measures could include the following: 1) actors promoting ATT compliance (such as states parties and CSOs) can highlight the synergies of the ATT with other arms control instruments (Spano and Alpers, 2017b); 2) regional organizations can support ATT implementation as part of regional approaches; 3) donors, CSOs, and other actors supporting ATT implementation can link the ATT to other more pressing state priorities; 4) states can share lessons, such as 'good practices for better distributing the workload and responsibilities between agencies', in CSPs, working group meetings, and outreach activities (ATT BAP, 2017, p. 19); 5) states can develop and streamline processes to collect and share information; and 6) states can further engage industry stakeholders. States could also consider developing a permanent inter-agency mechanism at the national level for national implementation monitoring and action, which could regularly interact with the national point(s) of contact (as designated by each state party in accordance with Article 5(6)) to facilitate the exchange of information on matters related to the implementation of the Treaty.

- **Donors should continue to support capacity building for key national sectors responsible for arms transfer decisions, monitoring, and enforcement, with a focus on developing sustainable mechanisms at the national and, where possible, subregional level.**

Lack of capacity can sometimes hinder effective compliance with the Treaty. The most common requests for assistance are usually related to technical and financial assistance, and help in building institutions. To overcome this capacity gap, donors should continue to target VTF and other donor funding on specific compliance areas such as technical support, the building of institutions, and the analysis of gaps in legal frameworks. It is important to note that activities such as capacity-building workshops, gap analysis, support on legislation, help with national control lists, assistance in enhancing and building reporting capacity, and the provision of equipment are among the types of assistance that the VTF can provide to states (United Kingdom, 2024).<sup>108</sup> In this regard, different CSOs and project implementers, including the Small Arms Survey, also have significant long experience in providing training, policy facilitation, and support at the national level.

- **States, donors, and other ATT stakeholders should recognize, encourage, and support contributions by CSOs and parliamentarians in overcoming challenges at various stages of state engagement with the ATT, including compliance.**

CSOs, including those working on gender equality, have a definite advocacy and oversight role that is instrumental in overcoming challenges to ATT universalization and compliance. Providing regular funding to CSOs from the region would allow them to design projects that are targeted to a specific context. Furthermore, including and involving national or regional CSOs in outreach activities ensures continuity in efforts towards ratification and compliance and in the dialogue related to the ATT at the national level.

CSOs at the national level can be actively engaged on ATT universalization and implementation. They can help produce cabinet papers, push the political agenda towards ATT universalization or compliance through advocacy efforts, and promote targeted activities to support it. As dialogue with national stakeholders develops, CSOs can continue to push legislative reviews; provide technical expertise; advise governments, new officials, parliamentarians, and national stakeholders on the ATT; address concerns that might arise as part of the process; share success stories; and demonstrate public support by providing, for instance, content for the media or by holding community leader consultations.

CSOs and parliamentarians can also play a key role in advocating for universalization and monitoring the implementation of international treaties. CSOs can provide an independent analysis of issues related to arms control and armed violence. They can advocate and provide access to knowledge that is sometimes lacking on behalf of governments and parliaments; devise and support multi-country campaigns for countries with similar realities; provide assistance at the national, regional, and international level; develop ad hoc regional or thematic resources; and monitor ATT compliance. Parliamentarians have an oversight and enabling role. They can have legislative and oversight tasks, such as drafting bills,

organizing dialogue initiatives and hearings, drafting shadow reports, and determining budgets.

In this regard, the KIIs highlighted how women active in CSOs may face barriers to participating in global arms debates in some contexts. Ensuring women's meaningful participation in processes related to ATT universalization and compliance by enabling them to contribute effectively to debates and activities is a legal obligation, but it can also contribute to better policy outcomes (Watson, 2024). CSOs working on gender equality and women's rights have an important role to play, as they bring new perspectives on how the ATT can contribute to other national priorities, such as the implementation of national frameworks on women, peace, and security; gender equality; violence reduction; and sustainable development. They can also help to support the effective implementation of Article 7.4 by sharing insights and data on the specific forms of arms-related gender-based violence and violence against women and children that are prevalent in a given area, as well as the types of mitigation measures that would be effective in preventing them (Austero and Watson, 2024). These CSOs can also be instrumental in supporting the work of members of parliament and ministries when it comes to monitoring the implementation of national arms control measures and in drafting effective strategies to ensure ATT compliance.

- **States should foster and maintain a broader group of civil stakeholders and interlocutors at the national level, including industry.**

A variety of stakeholders and interlocutors can play vital roles in compliance efforts. Defence industries, for example, are important stakeholders that should be engaged to devise effective measures and good practices in support of ATT implementation and compliance. Industry and the private sector have a key role in not only producing, but also transporting arms and ammunition. Past and current outreach activities and initiatives within the ATT framework have made efforts to engage with industry. For example, industry outreach events were one of the outreach activities that took place in the Philippines during its ratification process (MACAAP, 2016; 2019). Likewise, CSP10 Working Group meetings included a presentation on arms exporting companies' due diligence. It is thus extremely useful to continue to engage industry and consider the role it can play in responsible international transfers of conventional arms in the context of the ATT, as recommended by CSP9 and the thematic focus of the South Korean presidency of the ATT (ATT Secretariat, 2023c).

Finally, the Indo-Pacific region hosts several institutes, think tanks, and research organizations that promote an academic and research-oriented approach to security, defence, and arms control topics. Such organizations provide useful knowledge and expertise on themes related to the Treaty. Researchers and academics, for instance, can support different activities needed to improve universalization and compliance, such as national legislative and implementation processes.

They can also engage with military, defence, and security actors at the domestic and international level and provide evidence-based advice on the Treaty. Drawing from the expertise of those organizations, as well as on practitioners in fields such as criminology, development studies, and gender, can highlight how the ATT can play a role in contributing to other national policy objectives. ●

“Strong engagement at subregional and national levels is necessary to increase ATT universalization and compliance and better address specific sub-regional and national concerns.”

## Conclusion

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**T**he Indo-Pacific region is vast and diverse, presenting various realities and security challenges, and hosting major producers, exporters, and importers of conventional arms as well as small countries and islands with rather limited trade and few problems related to illicit arms. For these reasons, it is difficult to comprehensively capture the variety of challenges to ATT universalization and compliance in a single report. Nevertheless, this Report provides a snapshot of these challenges and a deeper understanding of this complexity. Perceptions of the ATT differ across the region, and are reflected in countries' attitudes towards the Treaty. At the same time, these attitudes are shaped in ways that are unique to each country and influenced by their perception of diverse subregional and national geopolitical, strategic, trade, and capacity issues and considerations.

Strong engagement at subregional and national levels is necessary to increase ATT universalization and compliance and better address specific subregional and national concerns; a 'one-size-fits-all' approach cannot capture subregional and national realities. Support for further analysis of country realities and a constant, tailored engagement with subregional and national actors and stakeholders would therefore be needed to generate a higher uptake and membership of the Treaty in the region. Yet, there are some commonalities in the challenges faced by countries in the region, and therefore some common measures that can be adopted.

The Report has highlighted a number of potential measures and means to address challenges to universalization and compliance, which represent concrete entry points for further engagement and cooperation with the region. These include the following: measures that actors involved in promoting ATT universalization and compliance can further implement, such as focusing on states that have engaged with the ATT, whether directly or indirectly, and building on that engagement; activities that CSOs and research institutes can promote, such as providing better evidence and research on illicit arms trade or on specific aspects of the Treaty to enable countries and government agencies to better assess security challenges and the benefits of ATT membership; and suggestions for states, such as promoting inter-agency cooperation, both within countries and with the region and its subregions, to make the transition to ATT membership smoother, and for ATT states parties, particularly major ATT donors and exporters, to ensure that acceding to the Treaty is seen as a net benefit, rather than a burden. Finally, they include a call to engage civil society, academia, industry, and other interested parties in helping build the political will towards ATT membership and maintaining the momentum towards enhanced universality and compliance.

These and other potential strategies will not only increase universalization and compliance, but also support the current strategy and work plans of the WGTU and WGETI, as well as current and future efforts of the ATT Secretariat towards those goals. Taken together, these measures offer a way forward and potential opportunities to increase understanding of the usefulness of the ATT as a vehicle for arms control in the region and to advance ATT universalization and compliance in the Indo-Pacific region.

CSOs remain at the forefront of efforts towards improved ATT universalization and compliance in the region. Two of these regional CSOs, CAVR and NISEA, were instrumental in the creation of this Report, and, along with other organizations in the Indo-Pacific region, certainly have more to give. Engaging with and using the talents and connections that regional CSOs have to offer will be crucial to increasing ATT uptake in the region.

Finally, the Indo-Pacific region boasts many capable institutes, think tanks, and research organizations that are engaged in security-, defence-, and arms control-related issues. These actors remain extremely relevant in supporting universalization and compliance, as they can engage with military, defence, and security stakeholders and provide evidence-based advice on ways to strengthen the effectiveness of ATT universalization and compliance in the Indo-Pacific region.

Ten years after its entry into force, the ATT remains the only legally binding international agreement to regulate and improve the regulation of the international trade in conventional arms, and to prevent and eradicate the illicit trade in conventional arms and prevent their diversion. By doing so, the Treaty aims to contribute to international and regional peace, security, and stability; reduce human suffering; and promote cooperation, transparency, and responsible action by states parties in the international trade in conventional arms—thereby building confidence among states parties (UNGA, 2013, art. 1). ATT universalization and compliance remain key to reaching the stated objects and purposes of the Treaty. By investigating the challenges to universalization and compliance to the ATT in the Indo-Pacific region, which has one of the lowest uptakes of the Treaty, this Report has identified possible entry points and opportunities for future engagement with the region. These measures can complement ongoing and future efforts on ATT universalization and compliance and provide further policy options to develop and support effective engagement strategies with the ATT in the Indo-Pacific region. ●

# Endnotes

- 1 Some of the following measures and possible activities were either derived from or proposed in interviews and informal exchanges conducted with different stakeholders as part of the project, or raised during an informal session by invitation only organized with states from the region during the ATT Working Group meetings in February 2024.
- 2 In this Report, the use of the term Indo-Pacific refers to the 40 countries and economies identified by Global Affairs Canada: Australia; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Brunei; Cambodia; the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea); India; Indonesia; Japan; Laos; Malaysia; the Maldives; Mongolia; Myanmar; Nepal; New Zealand; the Pacific Island countries (14); Pakistan; People's Republic of China (China); the Philippines; Republic of Korea (South Korea); Singapore; Sri Lanka; Taiwan, China; Thailand; Timor-Leste; and Vietnam.
- 3 This Report uses the term 'Indo-Pacific' in line with endnote 2, but refers to 'Asia' or 'Asia and Oceania' if the original source, in this case SIPRI, does so. The geographical scope of Asia and Oceania, as defined by SIPRI, encompasses all countries and economies of interest for the Report, plus Afghanistan and Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan).
- 4 These countries are Australia, China, Japan, the Maldives, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, the Philippines, South Korea, Samoa, and Tuvalu. The list is based on the geographical delimitations of Indo-Pacific noted in endnote 2, rather than those of Asia and Oceania used by the ATT Secretariat.
- 5 These countries are Bangladesh, Cambodia, Kiribati, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nauru, Singapore, Thailand, and Vanuatu. The list is based on the geographical delimitations of Indo-Pacific noted in endnote 2, rather than those of Asia and Oceania used by the ATT Secretariat.
- 6 Compliance has been defined as 'a state of conformity or identity between an actor's behaviour and a specified rule' (Raustiala and Slaughter, 2002, p. 539). On the difference between compliance and 'implementation', see Raustiala and Slaughter (2002, pp. 538–39).
- 7 For a definition of 'gender equality', see LeBrun (2019, p. 21).
- 8 The authors tracked activities offered by the WGTU, the ATT Secretariat, regional organizations, and the implementers of the EU P2P Arms Trade Treaty Outreach Programme: BAFA and Expertise France.
- 9 These included all projects funded by the ATT VTF, the UN Trust Facility Supporting Cooperation on Arms Regulation (UNSCAR), and bilateral donors.
- 10 The interviewees included a former CSP president and co-chair of the WGTU, national officials, officials of international organizations, representatives of national agencies implementing



assistance programmes, researchers, and CSO representatives. Most of the interviewees spoke in their personal capacities and not as government representatives. This ensured an open exchange on the attitudes towards the ATT and possible challenges to universalization and compliance. To preserve the anonymity of respondents, information gathered from the conversations and interviews is not attributed to specific interviewees.

- 11 As a result of this research, a blog post on gender aspects related to the ATT was published as part of the ‘Understanding Challenges to Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) Universalization and Compliance in the Indo-Pacific Region’ project (see Austero and Watson, 2024).
- 12 The SIPRI definition of military expenditure ‘aims to include all spending on current military forces and activities’. It also includes spending on weapons, weapons systems and platforms, and other specifically military equipment (including the research and development for such equipment) (SIPRI, n.d.b).
- 13 This Report uses the term ‘small arms’ to refer to small arms and light weapons. The term ‘light weapons’, however, always refers only to those items. The term ‘firearms’ comprises small arms and heavy machine guns.
- 14 See UNROCA (n.d.b); SIPRI (n.d.c); and UN Comtrade (n.d.).
- 15 The scope of the ATT—that is, the items and activities that the ATT requires states parties to regulate through their national control systems—is specified in Article 2. The Treaty applies to eight categories of conventional arms: (a) battle tanks; (b) armoured combat vehicles; (c) large-calibre artillery systems; (d) combat aircraft; (e) attack helicopters; (f) warships; (g) missiles and missile launchers; and (h) small arms and light weapons (UNGA, 2013, art. 2(1)). ATT definitions corresponded to the UNROCA list at the time of entry into force of the Treaty on 24 December 2014 (art. 5(3)). Since then, the UNROCA categories have been amended, whereas the minimum scope of the ATT has not evolved (Holtom, 2021; Varisco, Maletta, and Robin, 2021, pp. 5–13).
- 16 These countries are Australia, China, India, Malaysia, Maldives, New Zealand, Palau, South Korea, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. Reporting on small arms and light weapons transfers to UNROCA is optional (Holtom, 2021). For a definition of small arms and light weapons, see the International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons (ITI) (UNGA, 2005, art. 4).
- 17 According to the definition of the SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, major arms include the following: aircraft; air defence systems; anti-submarine warfare weapons; armoured vehicles; artillery; engines; missiles; sensors; satellites; ships; and others (specific turrets for armoured vehicles and for ships, and air refuelling systems). For more information, see SIPRI (n.d.d).
- 18 HS codes refer to the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System developed by the World Customs Organization and is in common use around the world (WCO, n.d.).
- 19 In 1971, the UN recognized Taiwan as a province of China.
- 20 The authors define self-reliance as ‘a state’s capability to domestically design and produce military goods across the entire spectrum of its armed forces’ requirements, with no input of foreign technology’ (Béraud-Sudreau et al., 2022, p. 1).
- 21 Author interviews with confidential sources, November 2023 and January 2024.
- 22 See Jenzen-Jones (2014); Matthews and Koh (2019, ch. 25); Ammoterra (n.d.); Picard, Holtom, and Mangan (2019); and Chopra (2020).
- 23 Data for 2023 is included where it was available at the time of writing.
- 24 UNROCA covers the following categories of conventional arms: battle tanks, armoured combat vehicles, large-calibre artillery systems, combat aircraft and unmanned combat aerial

- vehicles (UCAV), attack helicopters, warships, missiles, and missile launchers (UNROCA, n.d.a). Since reporting to UNROCA on small arms and light weapons is optional, data on this category is presented separately.
- 25 Those countries are Australia, Brunei, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, and Thailand (although Brunei, Indonesia, Japan, and the Philippines did not report any exports). No data was available for the remaining countries.
  - 26 For an overview of the discussions within UNROCA on reporting on small arms, see Holtom (2021). UNROCA covers the following types of small arms: revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, sub-machine guns, assault rifles, and light machine guns. It defines light weapons as: heavy machine guns, hand-held underbarrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-tank guns, recoilless rifles, portable anti-tank missile launchers and rocket systems, and mortars of calibres less than 75 mm (UNROCA, n.d.a).
  - 27 Those countries are Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, North Korea, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam. No data was available for the remaining countries.
  - 28 See endnote 17 for SIPRI's categories of major arms.
  - 29 For a detailed explanation of the methodology, see SIPRI (n.d.d).
  - 30 SIPRI provides information on trends alongside their data. In order to provide a complete overview of SIPRI data, this Report includes this additional information.
  - 31 The database uses the following HS codes: 930190 (military weapons, other than revolvers, pistols, and the arms of heading 93.07); 930200 (revolvers and pistols, other than those of heading 93.03 or 93.04); 930310 (muzzle-loading firearms); 930320 (other sporting, hunting or target-shooting shotguns, including combination shotgun-rifles); 930330 (other sporting, hunting or target-shooting rifles); and 930120 (rocket launchers, flame-throwers, grenade launchers, torpedo tubes, and similar projectors). See also Jenzen-Jones and Schroeder (2018) and endnote 19.
  - 32 See also Jenzen-Jones and Schroeder (2018).
  - 33 Data on ammunition was retrieved in December 2023.
  - 34 Data for 2023 is included where it was available at the time of writing.
  - 35 Asia and Oceania is also the largest geographical region in the SIPRI regional coverage, which can partly explain the high values of imports.
  - 36 The Maldives and Nepal reported a very high number of small arms under some specific codes (the Maldives reported 1,208,154 of small arms under HS code 930190 in 2019, and Nepal reported 639,069 of small arms under HS code 930190 in 2020). As these were most likely instances of misreporting, these outliers have not been included in the total calculations.
  - 37 See 'Sources of illicit arms' subsection for more information on brokering.
  - 38 This section primarily relies on a literature review of secondary sources.
  - 39 There is a certain overlap between the definitions of firearms and small arms (Florquin, Lipott, and Wairagu, 2019, p. 23). This subsection uses the term 'firearms' when the original source does so. See also endnote 13.
  - 40 According to the Global Organized Crime Index, 'the trafficking of arms involves the import, export, acquisition, sale, delivery, movement or transfer of arms, their parts and components and ammunition across national borders, as well as intentional diversion of firearms from legal to illegal commerce, without involving the movement of items across physical borders' (Global Organized Crime Index, n.d.b).

- 41 This was also supported by the authors' exchanges with a confidential source, June 2024.
- 42 One of the authors of this study also conducted field research on illicit arms along the Nepal–India border in 2014.
- 43 It is important to note that data on modes of transport is often skewed by customs practices.
- 44 The UN defines a 'broker' as 'a person or entity acting as an intermediary that brings together relevant parties and arranges or facilitates a potential transaction of small arms and light weapons in return for some form of benefit, whether financial or otherwise'. 'Brokering' is defined as 'activities carried out by a broker in the context of arranging or facilitating an international transfer of small arms or light weapons' (UN, 2018). On illicit brokering, see UNGA (2007).
- 45 Authors' exchanges with confidential source, June 2024.
- 46 Examples of these groups include, but are not limited to: groups affiliated to the non-state armed group Islamic State, the Hizbul Mujahideen, the Rohingya Solidarity Organization, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland, the Free Aceh Movement, Abu Sayyaf, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines, and the Patani United Liberation Organisation (Rana and Nesa, 2018; Dahari, Idris, and Othman, 2019; Cheema, 2014; Siyech, 2019; Tri Wulandari and Antari, 2021; ICG, 2018; and Koorey, 2016).
- 47 As a further example, Article II(6) of the ITI defines small arms and light weapons as illicit if '[t]hey are transferred in violation of arms embargoes decided by the Security Council in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations' (UNGA, 2005, p. 3).
- 48 The Royal United Services Institute has created a 'DPRK Reports Database' that provides summary data on the nature of the activities and entities documented by the panel reports. See RUSI (n.d.).
- 49 The North Korea 'sanctions regime' covers a progressively comprehensive range of goods and services across the ten UNSC resolutions. These include, but are not limited to: an embargo on arms (including conventional weapons) and materiel; an embargo on items, materials, equipment, goods, and technology relevant to nuclear, ballistic missile, and other weapons of mass destruction–related programmes; and catch-all provisions related to arms and materiel and dual-use items. For more information on all measures included in the North Korea sanctions regime, see UNSC (2018).
- 50 In 2013 Panamanian authorities stopped and inspected this vessel and discovered, concealed under more than 200,000 bags of sugar, a total of 240 tons of arms and related materiel. The shipment, originating in Cuba, was destined for North Korea (UNSC, 2014, paras. 69–74, annexe VIII).
- 51 Reports indicating that the Russian Federation, a P5 member state of the UNSC, is sourcing arms and ammunition from North Korea to pursue its war effort in Ukraine (UNSC, 2023, para. 122), as well as its recent veto of the adoption of a resolution to extend the mandate of the North Korea panel to 30 April 2025 (UN, 2024), undermine the general goal of such arms embargoes.
- 52 These types of arms were also referred to as craft, artisanal, improvised, or homemade weapons, or privately made firearms (Haug and Kramer, 2002; Batchelor, 2003).
- 53 The ITI definition of 'illicit small arms and light weapons' also includes small arms that are 'considered illicit under the law of the State within whose territorial jurisdiction the small arms or light weapon is found', are 'not marked in accordance with the provisions of this Instrument', are 'manufactured or assembled without a licence or authorization from the competent authority of the State where the manufacture or assembly takes place', or 'are

transferred without a licence or authorization by a competent national authority' (UNGA, 2005, art. 6). As production, use, and transfers of privately made and other non-industrial small arms and light weapons increase, their impact on peace, security, and stability is also growing, along with the challenges for existing regulations for production and export controls.

- 54 For a historical perspective of local production of weapons in Pakistan, see Shah Khan (2005); Batchelor (2003); and Malik, S. (2000).
- 55 Roughly half of the illicit weapons documented by Conflict Armament Research in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2021 were copies produced in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region of Pakistan. See CAR (2021).
- 56 See Chheng (2016); Chanveasna (2016; 2017); and Khouth (2015). For an article related to Vietnam, see Tieu and Minh (2023).
- 57 See also Al Jazeera (2024). This could also lead to the know-how required to produce such weapons being transferred to other groups in the region.
- 58 A 2024 analysis of videos showing the weapons used by combatants in PNG's Enga highlands province also concluded that the majority of weapons carried by combatants appeared to be single-shot, craft-produced shotguns with a calibre roughly equivalent to 12 gauge, while a smaller number appeared to be armed with single-shot, mass-manufactured shotguns (author exchange with Philip Alpers, June 2024; ABC News, 2024; Swanston and Clark, 2024).
- 59 CAVR contributed to findings from this subsection with a background paper (CAVR, 2024).
- 60 On 28 April 1996, 35 people were killed in a mass shooting at the Port Arthur tourist precinct in south-east Tasmania, provoking a national debate about private gun ownership, particularly semi-automatic and automatic weapons (National Museum Australia, 2023).
- 61 Bushmasters are protected mobility vehicles.
- 62 The nine-year war of secession in Bougainville ended in 1997 and resulted in the death of hundreds of soldiers and rebels as well as 10,000 to 15,000 civilians, either from combat or from disease and deprivation (CAVR, 2024; Australia, 1999).
- 63 The Gun Control Committee, established in 2005, conducted a comprehensive assessment of legal frameworks and administrative systems and delivered an in-depth report containing 244 recommendations.
- 64 NISEA contributed to findings from this subsection with a background paper (NISEA, 2024).
- 65 The projects 'Transparency in Armaments: Promoting the UN Register of Conventional Arms in the ASEAN Region', implemented by SIPRI, and 'Gun Violence and Illicit Small-Arms Trafficking from a Gender Perspective', implemented by UNRCPD, for instance, were funded by UNSCAR in 2021 and 2018, respectively.
- 66 For example, Malaysia provided technical expertise to the Philippines' ATT VTF training for its frontline agencies in 2018, and the country engaged in the national workshop on arms embargoes organized by the Small Arms Survey and NISEA. Malaysia, the Philippines, and NISEA are also part of a cooperative framework on the regional initiatives on the ATT.
- 67 The OHCHR infographic mentions transfers from countries in the region such as China, India, Singapore, and Thailand.
- 68 In May 2017 Islamic State-inspired armed groups seized Marawi, an 'economic hub in the Lanao del Sur province of Mindanao, the second-largest island in the Philippines'. The Filipino military regained control of the city after five months (ICG, 2018).
- 69 These assistance efforts included workshops and training on NAP monitoring, UNROCA reporting, licensing, investigation and enforcement policies and procedures, and strengthening

- their arms control systems, as well as an industry outreach event and a study visit to the Rotterdam Port. Additionally, the United States' Export Control and Related Border Security Program (EXBS) provided assistance through USAID programmes in conflict-affected areas of Mindanao, with the aim of strengthening the foundation for peace and stability in the area.
- 70 Thailand could not only positively influence regional participation in the ATT, but could also provide a model for other inclusive legislation with regards to Article 7.4. For example, both Thailand and the Philippines have enacted legislation that can serve as a model for legislation on gender inclusion and the recognition of non-binary gender or sex that is currently used globally (Sawitta Lefevre, 2015; Cervantes, 2024).
- 71 The country has a zero-tolerance policy on illicit firearms and penalties are up to life imprisonment (NISEA, 2024).
- 72 Author interviews with confidential source, January 2024.
- 73 Author interviews with confidential sources, November 2023.
- 74 Author interviews with confidential sources, November 2023 and January 2024.
- 75 On the one hand, enhancing Mongolia's defence capabilities to guard against potential aggression from neighbouring states (a strategy known as internal balancing) presents a significant economic cost and is not viable in the long term. On the other hand, the prospect of Mongolia seeking security through external balancing by allying itself militarily with other countries is not feasible due to its current 'friendly' relationships with its neighbours. Mongolia's primary security and foreign policy strategy thus aims to maintain military neutrality while pursuing soft balancing (Mendee and Soyolgerel, 2022).
- 76 Author interview with confidential source, January 2024.
- 77 Projects have included, for instance, the 'Workshop on Capacity Building for the Programme of Action and the Arms Trade Treaty' in 2015 in Bangladesh, the 'Technical and Legal Assistance Project to Support Sri Lanka in the Implementation of the UN PoA and the ATT' in 2018 in Sri Lanka, and 'The National Workshop to promote the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and Support Nepal's Accession to the Treaty' in 2021 in Nepal.
- 78 Author interview with confidential source, April 2024.
- 79 Author interviews with confidential sources, November and December 2023.
- 80 Author interview with confidential source, January 2024.
- 81 Author interview with confidential source, January 2024, and UNROCA.
- 82 At the time of writing, the Maldives has not submitted an annual report for 2023.
- 83 Author interview with confidential source, January 2024.
- 84 Author interviews with confidential sources, January 2024.
- 85 The project 'Training on Gender-Mainstreaming Small Arms Control and Contribution to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Nepal', for example, was organized by UNRCPPD in 2022.
- 86 Author interviews with confidential sources, January 2024.
- 87 Written correspondence with confidential source, June 2024.
- 88 Author interview with confidential source, February 2024.
- 89 Author interview with confidential source, February 2024.
- 90 See also Canada's sanction related to Sri Lanka (Canada, 2023).
- 91 See ATT BAP (2017); ATT Monitor (2018); Persi Paoli and Kytomaki (2016); and ATT Secretariat (2018a, annexe A).
- 92 Author interview with confidential source, January 2024.

- 93 India, for instance, aimed at expanding its exports to USD 2 billion worth of defence equipment to a set of countries including Bangladesh and Vietnam (Sharma and Finaud, 2019).
- 94 Author interview with confidential source, January 2024.
- 95 Author interview with confidential source, February 2024; see also NISEA (2024) and Varella (2024).
- 96 Author interview with confidential source, January 2024.
- 97 Author interviews with confidential sources, November 2023 and January 2024.
- 98 Author interviews with confidential sources, November 2023 and January 2024.
- 99 The projects might be implemented by, or in conjunction with, UN agencies, international or regional organizations, CSOs, or other bodies named in the application.
- 100 Author interviews with confidential sources, January 2024. Some experts have proposed that 'VTF donors could send letters to non-party states about access to assistance' (Varisco, Maletta, and Robin, 2021).
- 101 Author interviews with confidential sources, November 2023 and January 2024.
- 102 Author interviews with confidential sources, January and February 2024; see also Jolly (2023, p. 42); NISEA (2024).
- 103 Some of the following measures and possible activities were derived from or proposed in interviews and informal exchanges conducted with different stakeholders during the project, or were raised during an informal session by invitation only organized with states from the region during the ATT Working Group meetings in February 2024.
- 104 The selection criteria of the ATT Sponsorship Programme include 'ATT Status (i.e. whether the applicant is a State Party, Signatory State, or a State that has not yet joined the Treaty), with due regard for ATT implementation and universalization priorities as determined by CSPs' (ATT Secretariat, 2019b).
- 105 See, for instance, the course provided by the Stimson Center on 'Strengthening Transit, Transshipment, and Brokering Controls to Prevent Illicit Arms Diversion' (Kaya, n.d.).
- 106 For instance, in the Philippines, 'all relevant government authorities submitted a position paper in favour of the ratification of the Treaty' (NISEA, 2024), and Thailand hosted an ATT outreach activity in 2024 that included officials from all relevant Thai agencies, ministries, and law enforcement authorities, including the Port Authority (BAFA, 2024).
- 107 The presentations are currently often included among the materials accessible from the calendar of 'events'.
- 108 Some of the areas for cooperation in the EU P2P Arms Trade Treaty Outreach Programme also include ratification, legislation, help in establishing a national control list, support on licensing, reporting, prevention of diversion, custom training, control authority, and inter-agency cooperation.

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# About the Small Arms Survey

The Small Arms Survey is a centre for applied knowledge dedicated to preventing and reducing illicit small arms proliferation and armed violence. The Survey informs policy and practice through a combination of data, evidence-based knowledge, authoritative resources and tools, and tailored expert advice and training, and by bringing together practitioners and policymakers.

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