

# Under the Spotlight:

## MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION OF SMALL ARMS MEASURES



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A steam roller crushes rifles and machine guns in front of Belgrade's City Hall in May 2002.

Reporting, monitoring, and verification appear essential to the success of ongoing efforts to tackle the small arms problem—as they have been in other areas of international concern. This chapter looks at how these processes affect the implementation of key small arms measures, in particular the *UN Programme of Action* and UN arms embargoes.

The chapter uses basic concepts that are fairly straightforward. When 'reporting', states and other actors give an account of action they have taken to implement particular agreements. 'Monitoring' involves the independent observation and evaluation of implementation efforts, while 'verification' usually refers to a process of information gathering and analysis to establish whether specific commitments, especially legal ones, have been complied with.

The first part of the chapter examines the UN Conference process and, more specifically, the contributions made by reporting and monitoring to the implementation of the July 2001 *UN Programme of Action*. The First Biennial Meeting of

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States (BMS), held in New York on 7–11 July 2003, saw a large number of states as well as international organizations report on their implementation of the *Programme* two years after its adoption. Yet regardless of whether national reports were detailed, states only rarely acknowledged and explained specific difficulties they had encountered in implementing the *Programme*, limiting the instructive potential of the reporting exercise.

**Table 8.1 State reporting on implementation of the *UN Programme of Action* as at end 2003**

Regions	Total states*	2002		2003	
		Reports	Regional percentage	Reports	Regional percentage
Africa	52	3	6	23	44
Americas	35	3	9	18	51
Asia	29	2	7	12	41
Europe	48	7	15	37	77
Middle East	14	0	0	10	71
Oceania	14	1	7	3	21
<b>Totals</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>54%</b>

Notes: For the current list of reports, see <<http://disarmament2.un.org/cab/salw-nationalreports.html>>

\*Comprising all 191 UN Member States, plus the Holy See (observer to the UN).

Reporting, while important, is not sufficient for effective implementation. The first part of the chapter examines two significant monitoring initiatives associated with the UN Conference process. The first is the joint report on *Programme* implementation produced by the Biting the Bullet (BtB) project and the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), while the second, the so-called Geneva Process, brings together governments, international organizations, and NGOs for regular informal consultations on *Programme*-related issues. Much significant information and analysis has been generated on the implementation of the *Programme of Action* in its first years; however, current initiatives do not provide a complete picture of *Programme* implementation nor of implementation challenges and solutions.

The second part of the chapter reviews efforts to verify compliance with mandatory UN Security Council arms embargoes. It looks at the institutions and mechanisms that underpin verification efforts, considers the question of their effectiveness, and briefly describes some of the key proposals for improving these systems. The effective implementation of Security Council arms embargoes is critical to achieving the goals of the *UN Programme of Action*—and not only because this issue is mentioned in the *Programme* itself. UN arms embargoes typically cover a broad range of weapons, including weapons of mass destruction and major conventional systems, but many of the arms that wreak havoc in embargoed zones are in fact small arms and light weapons.

While UN member states are legally bound to implement mandatory Security Council embargoes, verification systems have a crucial role to play in bolstering state compliance with these measures. The chapter demonstrates that where political interest in ensuring compliance with sanctions regimes is strong, associated verification systems can be far-reaching (for example, the sanctions in Iraq and the former Yugoslavia). Yet the problem with these systems is precisely that they tend to be weak where political will itself is weak (for example, the Somalia embargo in the pre-11 September 2001 period). Civil society monitoring does not share this limitation. Reports of embargo violations by NGOs thus play a crucial role in reinforcing verification (and compliance) across the board.



Older rebel fighters wrestle a gun from a younger peer over a disciplinary matter in the Liberian capital of Monrovia in August 2003.

Civil society monitoring is equally critical to the UN Conference process. In general, the chapter concludes that governments, international organizations, and NGOs all have crucial roles to play in ensuring that small arms measures are effectively implemented. In some contexts, for example the Geneva Process, states and civil society (together with international organizations) work towards this common end in relatively close partnership. In others, the relationship is more adversarial, as with independent NGO monitoring of state compliance with arms embargoes. Other situations, such as the BtB-IANSA monitoring project, fall somewhere in between.

Yet in all cases—and this is the chapter's second main conclusion—reporting, monitoring, and verification are crucial components of these efforts. These processes appear especially important at the global level, where some governments may feel less inclined to meet the expectations of fellow states in relation to small arms.

An arms embargo without a serious verification system is not a serious initiative. The absence of verification betrays states' lack of interest in abiding by their (legal) obligations. While there are some encouraging signs in the evolution of sanctions verification practice over the past decade or so, the chapter indicates that verification efforts, along with the sanctions regimes themselves, remain vulnerable to weakening political will. Civil society could potentially help to fill this gap.

The UN Conference process similarly depends on national reporting and independent monitoring for its success. Judging from the large number of national statements and reports presented to the 2003 BMS—along with the monitoring efforts now emerging from civil society—the Conference process is now in reasonable health. Nevertheless, we are still a long way from full implementation of the *Programme*: a significant reduction in small arms proliferation and misuse over the long term remains elusive. Sustained reporting and monitoring of *Programme* implementation will be essential to the continuing viability of this process.

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