



SharkMUN | June 12th - June 13th, 2026

Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ)

TOPIC A:

ILLICIT TRADE OF SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS (SALW)

Welcome Delegates!

Welcome delegates to the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ) of SharkMUN 2026.

In this committee, delegates will address one of the most persistent threats to international peace, security, and development: the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons (SALW).

Small arms and light weapons are responsible for a significant proportion of deaths linked to armed conflict and criminal violence worldwide. Unlike advanced military systems, SALW are relatively inexpensive, highly portable, easy to conceal, and widely available. Criminal organizations, terrorist groups, insurgencies, and transnational trafficking networks rely heavily on these weapons to sustain violence and undermine state authority.

Delegates must examine how illegal weapons are manufactured, trafficked, diverted from legal markets, and distributed across borders. The committee will explore how international cooperation, law enforcement coordination, border security, and criminal justice mechanisms can reduce the flow of illicit arms while respecting national sovereignty and legitimate security needs.

Introduction

Small arms generally include revolvers, pistols, rifles, carbines, assault rifles, and submachine guns. Light weapons include heavy machine guns, grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft systems, and man-portable anti-tank weapons.

According to the United Nations, hundreds of millions of small arms are currently in circulation worldwide. While many are legally owned, a significant number enter illicit markets through theft, corruption, diversion from government stockpiles, unauthorized manufacturing, and cross-border trafficking.



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The illicit trade in SALW contributes to armed conflict, terrorism, organized crime, gang violence, human trafficking, drug trafficking, and political instability. Regions affected by conflict often experience a continuous cycle in which weapons fuel violence while violence increases demand for weapons.

The international community has developed several mechanisms to address this challenge, including the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (PoA), the Firearms Protocol, and the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). Despite these efforts, illicit arms trafficking remains a major obstacle to peace, security, and sustainable development.

Timeline of Key Events

Year | Event

1945 | United Nations established

1997 | Organization of American States adopts the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms (CIFTA)

2000 | United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) adopted

2001 | United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons adopted

2001 | United Nations Firearms Protocol adopted

2005 | International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons adopted

2013 | Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly

2014 | Arms Trade Treaty enters into force

2022 | Increased concern regarding diversion of weapons from conflict zones

2025 | States continue reporting transnational firearms trafficking networks and illicit weapons seizures



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Key Terms

Small Arms

Weapons designed for personal use, including pistols, rifles, carbines, assault rifles, and submachine guns.

Light Weapons

Portable weapons generally operated by a small crew, including heavy machine guns, grenade launchers, and portable missile systems.

Arms Trafficking

The illegal movement, transfer, sale, or distribution of weapons across borders.

Diversion

The transfer of legally manufactured, imported, or exported weapons into illicit markets.

Stockpile Management

Procedures used to secure, monitor, store, and maintain weapons and ammunition.

Marking and Tracing

Methods used to identify and track firearms throughout their lifecycle.

Transnational Organized Crime

Criminal activity conducted across national borders by organized groups seeking financial gain.

Current Situation

The illicit trade of SALW remains one of the most significant global security challenges.

Weapons trafficked across borders fuel criminal violence in urban areas, sustain insurgencies in conflict zones, and strengthen terrorist organizations operating in fragile states. Criminal groups frequently exploit weak border controls, corruption, inadequate stockpile security, and limited international cooperation.



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In Latin America, firearms trafficking contributes significantly to gang violence and organized crime. In parts of Africa, illicit weapons continue to fuel armed conflict, insurgencies, and political instability. In Eastern Europe and other conflict-affected regions, concerns remain regarding diversion and unauthorized transfers of military equipment.

Technological developments have created additional challenges. Online marketplaces, encrypted communication platforms, and the spread of digital manufacturing technologies have complicated efforts by law enforcement agencies to track illicit weapons.

Although many countries have strengthened national legislation, enforcement capacity remains uneven. Effective responses increasingly require coordinated international action involving customs authorities, police agencies, prosecutors, border security services, and international organizations.

Main Countries Involved



USA



RUSSIA



CHINA



BRAZIL



SOUTH AFRICA

United States

One of the world's largest manufacturers and exporters of firearms. Plays a major role in international efforts to combat illicit trafficking and improve international tracing mechanisms.

Russia

A major exporter of conventional weapons and an important participant in discussions regarding state responsibility, sovereignty, and arms-transfer controls.

China

An important producer and exporter of conventional arms. Supports international cooperation against illicit trafficking while emphasizing respect for national sovereignty.



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Brazil

Experiences significant challenges involving illicit firearms circulation, organized crime, and urban violence. Supports stronger regional cooperation against trafficking networks.

South Africa

A major regional actor facing concerns related to weapons diversion, organized crime, and cross-border trafficking in Southern Africa.

Additional Stakeholder Positions

Country / Entity | Position

Canada | Supports stronger tracing systems, border cooperation, and implementation of international agreements.

United Kingdom | Supports international cooperation, law-enforcement coordination, and stronger controls against illicit trafficking.

France | Strong supporter of the Arms Trade Treaty and international tracing mechanisms.

Germany | Advocates export controls, stockpile security, and international cooperation.

Netherlands | Supports multilateral approaches and effective implementation of existing international frameworks.

Norway | Supports international cooperation and conflict-prevention measures.

Sweden | Supports stronger controls on illicit arms flows and international transparency.

Finland | Supports law-enforcement cooperation and implementation of international agreements.

Denmark | Supports multilateral cooperation and international tracing efforts.

Iceland | Supports rules-based international cooperation and crime prevention initiatives.

India | Supports measures that reduce illicit trafficking while respecting national sovereignty.



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Japan | Supports international security cooperation and effective implementation of existing frameworks.

Australia | Supports border security, tracing systems, and international cooperation.

Ukraine | Supports stronger controls against illicit trafficking and diversion.

INTERPOL | Facilitates international police cooperation and firearms intelligence sharing.

UNODC | Provides technical assistance and supports implementation of UNTOC and the Firearms Protocol.

UNODA | Coordinates United Nations disarmament initiatives and supports implementation of the Programme of Action.

Previous Attempts to Address the Problem

The international community has adopted several frameworks designed to reduce the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons.

The United Nations Programme of Action (PoA), adopted in 2001, remains the principal global framework for preventing, combating, and eradicating the illicit trade in SALW.

The Firearms Protocol supplements the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and promotes stronger controls on firearms manufacturing, marking, record-keeping, and international transfers.

The Arms Trade Treaty seeks to regulate international transfers of conventional weapons and reduce the risk of diversion to illicit markets.

Regional organizations including the European Union, the African Union, the Organization of American States, and ECOWAS have also implemented regional arms-control and trafficking-prevention measures.

Possible Solutions

- Strengthening international information-sharing regarding firearms trafficking networks.
- Improving border security and customs inspection capabilities.



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- Expanding firearms marking, tracing, and record-keeping systems.
- Enhancing stockpile management and weapons security procedures.
- Increasing cooperation between law enforcement agencies and prosecutors.
- Addressing corruption that facilitates arms trafficking.
- Expanding international assistance programs for developing states.
- Developing strategies to address emerging technologies that may complicate firearms control.
- Strengthening implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action and Firearms Protocol.

Guiding Questions for Delegates

1. How can states improve cooperation without compromising national sovereignty?
2. What measures are most effective in preventing legally acquired weapons from entering illicit markets?
3. How should the international community address weapons trafficking in conflict zones?
4. What role should INTERPOL and UNODC play in combating transnational firearms trafficking?
5. How can developing countries strengthen border security with limited resources?
6. Should international standards regarding firearms marking and tracing be expanded?
7. How should states address emerging technological challenges related to firearms trafficking?
8. What balance should be maintained between national security and international crime prevention?



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