PARLIAMENTARY FORUM
ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

The Declaration:

The Geneva Declaration was adopted at the General Assembly on the 15th December 2023. The Assembly followed the preceding international seminar "*Reducing threats to international security: Mobilising parliamentarians globally, with focus on Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and Middle East, for enhanced universalisation and implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty*" organised by the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons, hereafter the Forum, in collaboration with the Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU), in Geneva, Switzerland, 13th to14th of December, 2023.

The participants extend their heartfelt gratitude to the IPU and the Forum for generously hosting the aforementioned seminar.

The Geneva Declaration

Parliamentarians from countries in the **Asia and the Pacific, Africa, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East** regions **note with deep concern** the escalating situation globally in terms of armed conflicts, with 2022 being the deadliest year in terms of armed violence since 1994[1], and the number of forcibly displaced people reached over 108 million in 2022[2], the highest number since records began. Armed conflict and violence, independent of its scale, is perpetuated by the availability of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). More than 1 billion SALW are circulating worldwide, of which 85% are in the hands of civilians[3], resulting in 260 000 SALW-related fatalities in 2021[4]. Women and youth are disproportionally affected by the negative impact of the uncontrolled flows of SALW.

The participants therefore express their concern regarding the profound human costs and the effect of SALW-related violence on global sustainable development, including economic and social development; **emphasise that the most affected** by violence are the already marginalised and vulnerable populations as well as the threat posed by SALW to democracy and good governance; **and stress the need** for concise and effective steps to tackle the uncontrolled proliferation of SALW; **strongly underline the urgent** need for an end to hostilities globally and immediate ceasefire in all ongoing armed conflicts, in particular where civilians are targeted.

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[1] Institute for Economics & Peace (2023), *Global Peace Index 2023*, available at: https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/GPI-2023-Web.pdf

[2] UNHCR (2023): Global Trends Report 2022, available at: https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends-report-2022

[3] Small Arms Survey (2018): *Estimating Global Civilian-held firearms numbers*. http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/T-Briefing-Papers/SAS-BP-Civilian-Firearms-Numbers.pdf

[4] Small Arms Survey (2023): *GLOBAL VIOLENT DEATHS IN 2021* https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/SAS-GVD-2023-update-FINAL_0.pdf

The parliamentarians present call for the need to prioritise the prevention and reduction of SALW-related violence and underscore the paramount need for parliamentary action to advance universalisation and strengthen implementation of relevant international instruments such as the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition (Firearms Protocol), the United Nations Secretary General's Disarmament Agenda and the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (UN PoA).

The participants commit to continued efforts towards the Forum's overall vision of achieving more peaceful and sustainably developed societies through the three, mutually reinforcing methodological pillars of capacity-development, policy-shaping and awareness-raising, and by enhancing parliamentary action in the implementation and universalisation of relevant international frameworks for the prevention and reduction of SALW-related violence, as to safeguard human security for the benefit of the right-holders, the entire population.

The participants emphasise the legislative, oversight and awareness-raising roles of parliamentarians in transforming the relevant international frameworks to enforceable laws, regulations and for sustainable development. The Forum's mission to enhance the capacity of parliamentarians is vital for underpinning national ownership, political accountability and consolidating the parliamentary role as a whole, ultimately strengthening democratic institutions. Regional cooperation shall also be achieved, supported by regional and international Parliamentary Action Plans.

The participants also welcome the work of Forum Members at both national, regional and international levels. Initiatives like the Parliamentary Action Plans implemented by the Forum and its Members are relevant examples of parliamentary action at the national, regional and international levels and its considerable impact; **therefore, participants further encourage** strong cooperation, additional parliamentary initiatives and acknowledge the key role that parliamentarians have in SALW-control and prevention.

The participants confirm the need for the immediate implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and UNSCR 2250. The role of women and youth in SALW-related violence prevention and reduction is imperative for successful sustainable peace and security globally.

The participants underscore the importance of continued joint efforts, engagement and cooperation between different stakeholders, in line with the Sustainable Development Goal 17. **The participants call for** actions towards strengthening global partnerships to prevent and reduce SALW-related violence - bringing together parliamentarians, national, regional and international parliamentary assemblies, national governments, the international community, civil society, the research community, the private sector and other actors.

The participants note the increasingly challenging global situation for civil society in general, and for parliamentary organisations in particular, given shifting donor priorities. **The participants therefore call upon** the international community to reaffirm their commitment to work towards peaceful societies and sustainable development through the support of organisations such as the Forum and its partners.

Following the three roles of a parliamentarian, **the participants highlight examples** of parliamentary actions as concluded on by the Forum's recent relevant activities[5]:

1. Legislation
   1.1. Prioritise the signature and ratification of the ATT, as well as the Firearms Protocol.
   1.2. Include the gender equality and youth perspective when working with legislation regarding SALW control, both in terms of content in the legislation as well as promoting women's and youth's participation and leadership roles in the legislative process.
   1.3. Integrate SALW action plans into national development strategies; including in the National Plans about the WPS Agenda.
   1.4. Enhanced engagement with a variety of stakeholders, such as civil society, agencies and the Government, including through consultations related to the drafting process of new legislation or amendments on SALW-related processes and the WPS Agenda, as well as evaluation, as to ensure inclusion of a wider range of perspectives and efficient implementation.

2. Oversight
   2.1. Promote the use of parliamentary control tools to improve the implementation of the ATT and encourage the adoption of related gender responsive public policies and strategies.
   2.2. Stay informed by seeking advice from civil society organisations and research institutes in the oversight tasks, as these can provide expertise, experiences and voice issues.
   2.3. Form regional interparliamentary commissions with the objective of monitoring regional trade in SALW and harmonisation of national legislations.

3. Awareness-raising
   3.1. Approach parliamentary leadership (presidents, committee chairpersons, group leaders, etc.) to include the issue of signing, ratifying, and implementing the ATT on the agenda.
   3.2. Promote the development of formal or informal cross-party groups/networks to raise awareness on SALW-related violence and champion relevant instruments.
   3.3. Disseminate to the public; reports, policy statements and relevant data on SALW-related violence, and the importance of ratification and implementation of the ATT, through the media.

[5] International seminar in Geneva, Switzerland 13-14 December 2023, regional seminar in Asia in June 9-10 2022, regional seminar in Latin America and the Caribbean on June 30-July 1 2023, and the regional seminar in Middle East and North Africa on 24-25 September 2019.