ILLICIT ARMS TRANSFER IMPLICATIONS
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

PREPARED BY: ABEER GHAITH

The intersection between smuggling and illicit transfer of weapons and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is evident, particularly in SDG 16, which aims to reduce illicit flows of money and weapons, promote the recovery and return of stolen assets, and combat organized crime by 2030. The establishment of peaceful societies where no one is marginalized is the ultimate objective. Sustainable development is a term coined by the United Nations that encompasses environmental, social, and economic development on a global scale. Its primary focus is to improve the living conditions of individuals, develop sustainable methods of production, and manage resources in a manner that does not deplete the Earth's natural resources, thus ensuring the well-being of future generations. Additionally, it aims to meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the rights of future generations or overexploiting the planet's resources.

Sustainable Development Goals serve as a global call to action to eradicate poverty, preserve the environment, and enhance living conditions worldwide. These 17 goals were adopted by all UN Member States in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which outlines a 15-year plan to achieve these objectives.

Consequently, the United Nations, along with numerous regional organizations, specialized international agencies, and non-governmental organizations, have mobilized efforts to implement the sustainable development goals and foster a global humanitarian community capable of addressing global challenges, eliminating poverty, transforming unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, and safeguarding natural resources. The aim is to prevent global environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, desertification, and tackle water, air, and marine pollution, all with the goal of establishing secure and peaceful societies.

However, illicit trade in small arms and light weapons exacerbates conflicts, worsens humanitarian situations, and hinders development. Security Council has emphasized the importance of political will and effective arms management in addressing and diverting the trafficking of arms and ammunition to conflict areas. The diversion and trafficking of weapons and ammunition are critical factors that undermine peace and security. The misuse of illicit weapons and ammunition has far-reaching consequences, including loss of life, injuries, displacement, psychological trauma, and long-term social and economic impacts, such as limited access to healthcare, education, and humanitarian services, as well as hindrances to the protection of civilians and

sustainable development. Consequently, it is crucial to address all stages of the weapons life cycle, including production, export, and storage.

Illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, along with their diversion and re-diversion to unauthorized end-users, contributes to high levels of armed violence, crime, and terrorism. Therefore, it is in the interest of all countries to take comprehensive measures to tackle this issue. Furthermore, all Member States acknowledge that illicit arms trade has implications for achieving multiple sustainable development goals, including those related to peace, justice, poverty reduction, education, and creating safe societies. As part of its campaign **#Let's_Keep_Weapons_Safe**, **Maat for Peace, Development, and Human Rights** presents this study, which will specifically focus on the impact of legitimate weapons transfers on undermining a specific set of sustainable development goals, with a particular emphasis on SDG 16 and the relationship between illicit arms transfers and sustainable development.

First: Intersection Between Illicit Arms Transfer and Sustainable Development

Illicit arms smuggling poses a significant challenge for countries affected by conflict. The United Nations recognizes that arms smuggling contributes to increased crime and terrorism rates, undermining the ability of countries to implement sustainable development goals and achieve their desired outcomes. While the international community has shown concern over the potential acquisition of nuclear weapons by terrorist organizations, the trade of small arms remains equally perilous in many regards.

Regrettably, the widespread presence of smuggled weapons often results in innocent civilians becoming the victims, individuals who are typically far removed from the conflicts surrounding them. The social impact caused by smuggled weapons is exemplified by the use of landmines, which pose their own set of problems due to their disproportionate and indiscriminate nature. The use of landmines persists worldwide, even after conflicts have ended, claiming the lives of innocent civilians or, at best, leaving them disfigured.

Smuggled weapons are frequently employed by non-state actors, creating a constant threat to security and exacting a heavy toll on society. Given the nature of global markets, it is impossible to completely halt arms deals. However, the United Nations acknowledges that while the problem of small arms smuggling cannot be entirely solved, it can be controlled and reduced.

A prominent example of this challenge is manifested in the Yemeni crisis, where prolonged conflict and the increasing violation of regional resolutions prohibiting the

supply of weapons to the Houthis have had direct consequences on Yemen's ability to implement sustainable development goals. The illicit arms trade has also severely impacted and will continue to impact a wide range of basic human rights for the Yemeni people, including the right to life, liberty, health, education, security, freedom of movement, thought, assembly, and expression.

Ongoing reports of violence on the front lines underscore the urgent need for an official ceasefire. Access to basic services, safety, and security remains elusive for millions of people, with 80% of Yemen's population still struggling to obtain food. The complete collapse of the country's health system has resulted in preventable deaths occurring every two hours during pregnancy or childbirth for women. Basic necessities remain unavailable to a significant portion of the population, while 80% of the resources required to implement humanitarian support and response operations remain unavailable.[1]

Goal 1: Eradicating Poverty

Proliferation of weapons, particularly illegal ones, perpetuates conflicts, which, in turn, undermine development efforts and hinder progress towards the eradication of poverty, a primary goal of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

In Yemen, the conflict has led to a decline in economic growth, disrupted family incomes, and forced millions to endure dire conditions. Since 2016, salary payments in the public sector, employing 30% of Yemen's workforce, have been suspended due to a liquidity crisis and have yet to be fully reinstated. In the private sector, a third of companies have closed down, resulting in widespread job losses affecting both formal and informal workers. If the conflict persists until 2030, it is projected that the proportion of the population living in poverty will reach 88% (34.1 million). Similarly, the percentage of individuals living in extreme poverty is expected to rise to nearly 80% (30.1 million) if the conflict continues until 2030. Therefore, it can be asserted that if the war in Yemen persists until 2030, poverty will become more widespread and severe, exceeding the levels observed in 2014 by more than eleven-fold.[2]

Goal 2: Zero Hunger

There is an unquestionable relationship between the smuggling of weapons and their illegal transfer to parties to the conflict and the continuation of armed conflicts.

---

[1] رعاية الحرب دول الاتحاد الاوروبي تعيد بيع لاسلحة إلى التحالف العربي بينما يتشبث اليمن بالسلام،، Euro Med Monitor، 22 يونيو 2023، الرابط، https://bit.ly/46acxqq

[2] Assessing the impact of war in Yemen:on Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, UNDP, 2019, link, https://bit.ly/45EtBDP

3

Consequently, the continuation of conflicts leads to a significant decline in food imports due to restrictions, lack of purchasing power and limited foreign exchange, which exposes citizens, especially children, to a high risk of diseases such as malnutrition and stunting.

Malnutrition is a major issue for **Syrian children**, especially since the war has been going on for over 12 years, and nutrition programs in Syria remain without sufficient support. According to human rights reports, at least one in eight children in Syria suffers from stunting due to malnutrition, and there are children who suffer while still being fetuses. Each in three pregnant women suffers from anemia and other necessary nutrient deficiencies, and thousands also suffer from malnutrition[3].

In Yemen, since November 2017, the complete closure of ports has led to a significant decrease in access to food, which has led to a significant rise in prices and forced some families to reduce consumption. To date, food imports have not yet returned to pre-lockdown levels. Yemen's already weak food system has also been devastated, destroying or disrupting food production and distribution[4].

Reports at the end of 2019 also confirmed that the number of people suffering from malnutrition increased by more than 60 percent (to more than 10.7 million or 36.1 percent of the population) compared to 2014 levels. If the conflict continues until 2030, it is expected to suffer even more than 95% of Yemenis from malnutrition. The conflict also led to a significant increase in the prevalence of severe acute malnutrition in children by 9.2 percent in 2019 – resulting in Yemen having the second-highest prevalence of severe acute malnutrition after South Sudan[5].

In 2021, four United Nations agencies, namely the FAO, UNICEF, the World Food Program and the World Health Organization, warned that 2.3 million children under the age of five in Yemen would suffer from acute malnutrition in 2021, warning that 400,000 children would die due to severe acute malnutrition, especially due to the high rate of the phenomenon in 2020[6]. These numbers will continue to increase due to steady population growth. In absolute terms, the number of children suffering from acute malnutrition by 2030 if the conflict continues from 207,000 in 2014 to more than 502,000[7].

---

[3]اطفال اليمن وسوريا وليبيا .. سوء تغذية وألغام وضحايا تهريب، DW ، سبتمبر 2022، الرابط، https://bit.ly/3rW9qUa

[4] Assessing the impact of war in Yemen:on Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, UNDP, 2019, link, https://bit.ly/45EtBDP

[5] Assessing the impact of war in Yemen:on Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, UNDP, 2019, link, https://bit.ly/45EtBDP

[6] اطفال اليمن وسوريا وليبيا .. سوء تغذية وألغام وضحايا تهريب، DW ، سبتمبر 2022، الرابط، https://bit.ly/3rW9qUa

[7] Assessing the impact of war in Yemen:on Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, UNDP, 2019, link, https://bit.ly/45EtBDP

Goal 4: Quality Education

Smuggled weapons for armed groups without states are often used to influence the right to education, as the use of these weapons in bombing educational facilities or even targeting teachers breaks down the educational process. Overall, education for sustainable development empowers people of all ages by providing them with the necessary knowledge, skills, values, and behaviors needed to address the interconnected global challenges we face, such as climate change, environmental damage, biodiversity decline, poverty, and inequality. Education for sustainable development is recognized as an essential component of SDG 4, which is centered on quality education, and as a key enabler for all other SDGs[8].

One of the most significant casualties of armed conflict and humanitarian crises affecting communities and individuals is the **deprivation of education**, which is one of the most prominent examples of the heavy losses of continuing conflict and the spread of weapons. Typically, the number of children resuming their education after each conflict decreases, primarily due to direct and indirect forms of damage. Direct damage includes injuries, physical disabilities and damage to educational and residential buildings, displacement, and loss of family members; or due to indirect damages, such as poverty, unemployment, child labor, and long-term psychological effects. As a result of the ongoing conflict there, most of the children who remain out of the classroom come from the Middle East and North Africa region, including Syria, Yemen, and Sudan.

In Syria, for example, UNICEF estimates for 2021 indicate that more than two million children are still deprived of education as a result of the war and subsequent displacement. The number of displaced children inside Syria has reached about 2.6 million children. Moreover, with the living conditions in the country deteriorating and over 90% of Syrians living below the poverty line, numerous children have been compelled to leave school and seek employment to support their families financially. However, these circumstances have been further aggravated by a shortage of available school spaces and the closure of several schools due to the damage they have suffered. For example, UNICEF statistics indicate that schools in Syria have been subjected to about 4,000 attacks since 2011, and one out of every three schools was out of service as a result of being completely destroyed or partially damaged, or because they were converted into military barracks or shelter centers for displaced people from other regions due to bombing and demolished homes.

---

[8] الهدف الرابع من أهداف التنمية المستدامة: التعليم، اليونيسكو، الرابط https://ar.unesco.org/gem-report/node/1346

Furthermore, the deterioration of the living conditions of Syrian refugees in countries of asylum, the difficulty of obtaining residence permits, the absence of logistical support, the lack of international funding and public spending on education in line with international standards, in addition to the host countries' failure to recognize the certificates of refugee students, the lack of school numbers and the growing racism and hatred against refugees and foreigners, All factors contributed to more than 800 thousand Syrian children in neighboring countries leaving school seats of which 300 thousand Syrian children in Turkey make up about 35% of the total number of Syrian children of school age in Turkey. Moreover, about another 30% have never entered school in Lebanon, while the rest are distributed among other asylum countries such as Jordan, Iraq, and Europe[9].

In Ukraine, attacks on schools continued unabated, exposing children to severe distress and leaving them without safe places to learn, with reports by UNICEF confirming that more than 1,300 schools have been completely destroyed in areas controlled by the Ukrainian government since the war began in 2022, while others have been badly damaged. Some schools were directly targeted and others closed as a precaution since the beginning of the Russian invasion, which included rocket and artillery attacks on residential areas across the country. The report also confirmed that ongoing attacks on Ukrainian schools have made only about a third of school-age children able to attend classrooms fully and personally while many are absent and more than half of the children whose families fled conflict to seven countries are not enrolled in local education systems, referring to language barriers and overstretched education systems[10].

As conflict dynamics evolve across the Arab region, conflict-affected countries face a unique set of context-specific challenges that restrict their ability to access resources and capabilities and undermine the benefits and sustainability of development gains. The current state of affairs is concerning, as only 18 percent of conflict-affected countries are so far on track to achieve selected targets of the Sustainable Development Goals, and 82 percent are either off track or lack adequate data to accurately assess progress. There is a growing awareness that to achieve many of the Sustainable Development Goals, it is necessary to tackle the unique challenges faced by countries affected by conflict. This can be accomplished through a comprehensive approach that combines

---

[9] تذكير.. سنة دراسية أخرى تُسرق من حياة أكثر من مليوني طفل سوري، euro med monitor، ١٤ سبتمبر 2022، الرابط، https://bit.ly/3Qoxs3Q

[10] يونيسيف: تدمير أكثر من 1300 مدرسة في أوكرانيا منذ بدء الحرب، الشرق الاوسط، أغسطس 2023، الرابط، https://bit.ly/46CcqUM

humanitarian actions with development and peace efforts. Failure to address the impacts of conflict may greatly hinder the progress and goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda for people and countries in the region[11].

Second: Challenges Facing Achieving Sustainable Development

Illicit arms transfer is linked to Target 16.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals. This target emphasizes by 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime. Goal 16 is also linked to significantly reducing all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere as well as ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence against and torture of children[12].

The factors of conflict, insecurity, weak institutions and limited access to justice continue to pose a major threat to sustainable development. Especially since the number of people fleeing war, persecution and conflict exceeded 70 million people in 2018, which is the highest level recorded by the UN Refugee Agency in nearly 70 years. In 2019, the United Nations tracked 357 murders and 30 cases of enforced disappearance among human rights defenders, journalists, and trade unionists in 47 countries. Also, about one in four births of children under the age of 5 around the world are not officially registered, depriving children of proof of legal identity, crucial to protecting their rights, and access to justice and social services[13].

Hence the formulation of Goal 16, which calls for promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Especially since the ongoing and new violent conflicts around the world are obstructing the global path towards peace and towards achieving Goal 16 of the SDGs. Around 25% of the global population resides in conflict-affected regions, and by the middle of 2022, over 100 million individuals had been forcefully displaced worldwide, which is more than twice the number recorded a decade ago. Additionally, citizens encounter difficulties in obtaining justice, basic services, and legal protections, with inadequate representation often stemming from ineffective institutional systems[14].

---

[11] تحقيق أهداف التنمية المستدامة في الدول المتأثرة بالنزاعات في المنطقة العربية، الاسكوا، أكتوبر ٢٠٢١، الرابط،
https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/pubs/pdf/attainment-sdgs-conflict-affected-countries-arab-region-arabic.pdf
[12] - يمكن الرجوع إلى الهدف 16 من أهداف التنمية المستدامة على الرابط، https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/ar/peace-justice/
[13] يمكن الرجوع إلى الهدف 16 من أهداف التنمية المستدامة على الرابط، https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/ar/peace-justice/
[14] تقرير المجلس الاقتصادي والاجتماعي التابع للامم المتحدة حول التقدم المحرز نحو تحقيق أهداف التنمية المستدامة ، ابريل 2023، الرابط،
https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/report/2023/secretary-general-sdg-report-2023--AR.pdf

From this goal emerged a number of goals and targets linked to reducing weapons smuggling, the most important of which was reducing the human costs of weapons, especially those related to protecting civilians in populated areas and protecting them from the effects of explosive weapons.

Increasing Human Costs of Weapons (Protecting Civilians in Populated Areas)

The human cost of the use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas reverberates long after the direct impact occurs, with prolonged disruptions to essential civilian services and a significant number of people being displaced for extended periods. According to international law, it is not acceptable to bomb homes, schools, or hospitals, and thus all parties involved in any international or non-international conflict have a responsibility to safeguard civilians from harm resulting from urban conflicts[15].

Therefore, all states have to protect civilians when launching military operations, however, this goal was not achieved in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) recorded more than 17,181 civilian casualties since February 14, 2022, and most civilian deaths and injuries continue to result from the use of explosive weapons with wide-ranging effects, including attacks with heavy artillery and multiple launch systems, missiles and aircraft. Besides thousands of civilian deaths and injuries, civil and vital infrastructure and services were destroyed, especially by the use of missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles, as well as the destruction of schools, roads and bridges, hospitals and health facilities were also affected. The outages of water, gas, heating, and electricity resulting from Russian attacks on energy infrastructure are a source of concern, especially with the onset of winter, which adds a new dimension to the humanitarian crisis and puts millions of people at risk.

It is worth noting that, under international humanitarian law, fighters must not direct attacks against civilians or civilian infrastructure and must take all feasible precautions in the conduct of military operations to avoid – or at least minimize – incidental loss of civilian life, civilian casualties and damage to civilian objects[16].

Impact of Explosive Arms on Civilians

The use of explosive arms in villages, towns, cities or other populated areas creates a consistent pattern of immediate and long-term harm to civilians, destroying lives, livelihoods and critical infrastructure. Besides the immediate impact, many civilians are

---

[15] قادة الامم المتحدة واللجنة الدولية يحثون على تكثيف الدعم العالمي لحماية المدنيين من استخدام الاسلحة المتفجرة في المناطق المأهولة، اللجنة الدولية للصليب الأحمر ، 14 نوفمبر 2022، الرابط، https://bit.ly/3t8R96y

[16] مجلس الامن يبحث مسألة استخدام الاسلحة التقليدية الثقيلة فيما خلفت الحرب المستعرة منذ تسعة اشهر دمارا هائلا، الامم المتحدة ، 11 ديسمبر 2022، الرابط، https://news.un.org/ar/story/2022/12/1116512

8

affected by the indirect and long-term effects of arms, also referred to as rebound effects. Children are also particularly vulnerable to various forms of psychological or emotional trauma, health care facilities are also being bombed, which hinders the provision of medical care. Housing and basic infrastructure such as drinking water, wastewater treatment plants and electricity supply systems are damaged or destroyed, increasing the risk and spread of disease and increasing the burden on the health care system.

In addition to bombing schools, which leads to interruption or cessation of access to education, poses a great danger to children and often exposes gender inequalities, the use of these arms in populated areas can also contribute to large-scale displacement, forcing people to leave their homes, often for long periods and in precarious conditions.

Hence, the use of these arms invariably leaves behind explosive remnants of war that can kill and injure civilians, especially children, even long after the end of hostilities. Waste can also prevent or delay reconstruction work or agricultural production, as well as the return of refugees and displaced persons[17].

Delay in Implementing the Target of Tracking down Illegal Arms

SDG 16.4 states that while arms tracing is a key measure in investigating and detecting the origin of illicit firearms, implementing systematic tracing remains a global challenge. On average, Member States for which data were available succeeded in tracing a third of the seized arms that were traceable between 2016 and 2021[18]. The arms trade spreads legally or illegally in many countries, which undermines any development efforts in these countries.

For example, we find that small and light arms represent a heavy burden on **Africa's** safety, security and stability. Moreover, these arms have long been considered one of the main tools and vectors of violence that has been expressed during the numerous conflicts that have erupted on the continent. During conflicts, small arms are often used to commit violations of human rights and humanitarian law, including massacres, forced displacement, gender-based violence and attacks on peacekeepers and members of humanitarian organizations. Beyond the direct context of armed conflict, illicit small arms exacerbate sectarian conflicts, overexploit natural resources and facilitate the commission of all types of criminal activities.[19]

---

[17] c

[18] تقرير المجلس الاقتصادي والاجتماعي التابع للامم المتحدة حول التقدم المحرز نحو تحقيق أهداف التنمية المستدامة ، ابريل 2023، الرابط،
https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/report/2023/secretary-general-sdg-report-2023--AR.pdf

[19] L'ATLAS DES ARMES Une cartographie des flux illicites d'armes légères en Afrique, le Small Arms Survey- l'UA, 2019

It is known that the main reasons behind uncontrolled flows are: -

- ✓ Overly lenient national legislation.
- ✓ Continuing gaps in national export control systems
- ✓ Corruption and lack of transparency.[20]

For example, we find that the main factors for arms smuggling and their spread in the Sahel region of Africa include the lack of security infrastructure dedicated to combating illicit arms, weak policing along the border and in less populated areas, and limited funding for security personnel and international actors who are actively working to subvert the arms embargo for armament. Hence, human rights reports emphasized that the human losses resulting from the failure to trace illegal arms and their spread in the African Sahel region are important for understanding the urgency of addressing the issue of arms tracing. According to the Armed Conflict Locations and Events Database, between February 2018 and February 2021, more than 67,400 people were killed as a result of armed clashes, attacks, mob violence, or land grabs by non-state or state actors in Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Burkina Faso, as Burkina Faso witnessed the largest increase in deaths compared to Mali and Niger, whose total annual deaths rose from about 300 in 2018 to nearly 1,900 in 2019. Other victims of gun tracing include those displaced as a result of increasing violence.

In early March 2021, the total number of refugees and asylum seekers from the region reached 871,765 people. Burkina Faso recorded 1,097,462 internally displaced persons, Chad recorded 336,124 displaced persons, Mali recorded 322,957 displaced persons, and Niger recorded 298,458 displaced persons. These figures highlight the impact of small and light arms in the hands of a variety of actors in the Sahel that contribute to ongoing violence. For example, the specific threat posed by Boko Haram to Nigerians near the border with Nigeria has prompted many in small villages to create security forces or vigilance committees to protect themselves. The circulation of arms in the region has also escalated tensions between communities such as pastoralists and farmers in Nigeria, such that conflicts are often resolved using small and light arms, and an increasing number of individuals are now arming themselves against potential attacks. Reducing arms trafficking therefore also has significant implications for those

---

[20] Political Will Along with Weapons-Control Management Critical in Stemming Illicit Trafficking of Small Arms, Speakers Tell Security Council, UN, 22 Nov 2021, link, https://press.un.org/en/2021/sc14708.doc.htm

who do not normally participate in the illicit arms market, but must do so to defend themselves from groups causing instability and violence.[21]

As for **Somalia**, it is known that the UN Security Council imposed an arms embargo on Somalia in 1992 due to civil war and violence between factions. In 2013, the Security Council voted unanimously to partially lift the arms embargo on Somalia for one year. The decision allowed the Somali government to purchase small arms to help its security forces develop and fight Islamic militants, but kept restrictions on heavy arms. Remaining sanctions requiring approval of certain arms requests are also renewed annually despite the government's objections that Al-Shabaab continues to seriously threaten peace and stability in the region and that sanctions are needed to undermine its activities.[22]

However, illicit arms smuggling continues to prolong the Somali conflict, as two illegal shipments of military equipment and explosives were seized in the port of Mogadishu on May 19, 2023 after the discovery of a cache of arms in the port and airport of Mogadishu, which were purchased from China on behalf of Al-Shabaab and their shipment was facilitated by a businessman to Somalia. The documents indicate that the materials seized at the port of Mogadishu include five high-specification JS drones capable of carrying 10 liters of liquid at an altitude of 500 meters above sea level and covering 10 hectares, rifle scopes, rolls of material for making military uniforms and 3,000 meters of fabric packed in 30-meter rolls to make tents. Other items include 18-night vision goggles, swimming goggles, 18 audio recording pens, 18 goggles, a spy watch, radios, military grade helmets, ghillie suits (camouflage), portable solar panels, 20 flashlights and a battery,[23] which led to the arrest of 10 people linked to a smuggling network. Investigations emphasized that the accused facilitated the purchase of military equipment from China in cooperation with Al-Shabaab's partners in Somalia. He allegedly used third-party online payment platforms such as WeChat and Alipay to pay for the equipment.[24]

---

[21] Political Will Along with Weapons-Control Management Critical in Stemming Illicit Trafficking of Small Arms, Speakers Tell Security Council, UN, 22 Nov 2021, link, https://press.un.org/en/2021/sc14708.doc.htm

[22] Political Will Along with Weapons-Control Management Critical in Stemming Illicit Trafficking of Small Arms, Speakers Tell Security Council, UN, 22 Nov 2021, link, https://press.un.org/en/2021/sc14708.doc.htm

[23] Police probe Kenyan trader 'for importing weapons for Al Shabaab terrorists', The East African, 27 Jun 2023, link, https://bit.ly/3E3xVRW

[24] Somalia seizes military shipments bound for Al Shabaab, The East African, 19 May 2033, link, https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/somalia-seizes-military-shipments-bound-for-al-shabaab-4240266

Corruption and Lack of Transparency Impact on Arms Tracking and Control Operations

In **Africa**, for example, and despite the will of the UN, non-governmental organizations specialized in combating illegal arms, intelligence agencies, and law enforcement agencies in African countries, the spread of small and light arms in Africa never stops. Worse still, it appears that these illegally obtained arms are now a favored business of rebel groups or terrorists in the most violent regions of Africa. From Africa's Great Lakes to the Sahel to North Africa, assault rifles and explosives are finding their way to criminals of all types.

While some of these arms are stolen from security forces after armed confrontations and another portion comes from local manufacturers, the majority of small and light arms used by African armed groups in fact come from licensed factories. Therefore, not uncommon to see relatively sophisticated equipment in the hands of terrorists. When it comes to the Ukrainian, South African, Chinese or Finnish AK-47 variants of the AK-47, the Israeli Galilee, the Belgian FN Fal or even ammunition from Europe and Latin America no one seems inclined to explain how these arms move around the world by contributing in the massacres of civilians in Africa.

The majority of illicit arms produced or trafficked to Africa according to reports from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Interpol or African law enforcement agencies are lighter and often more advanced. We find, for example, that official statistics confirm that the AK-47 is in the official arsenal of about 87 countries all over the world, including 33 African countries, even though it has been sold illegally in recent decades.[25]

<u>As for the conflict countries in the Arab region and the Middle East,</u> We find that this region's appetite for weapons is a cause and consequence of the conflicts that are still raging. All countries with the highest scores for arms trafficking in the conflict index are involved in conflict in one way or another. Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Turkey scored 9 out of 10 on this index, surpassed only by Libya (9.5), which serves as a hub and a primary country for the flow of weapons to the region. The source of recycled weapons in the region is Libya, so the chaos that followed the collapse of the Gaddafi regime in 2011 enabled supplies to move east to conflict areas.

The presence of conflict actors, both legitimate and illegitimate, makes the already ambiguous picture of the arms market even murkier, and access to weapons has enabled

---

[25] من أين تأتي الأسلحة غير المشروعة المستخدمة في أفريقيا؟، Le Journal de L' Afrique، 9 مارس 2022، الرابط https://bit.ly/3qoU4Xt

these armed groups to seize territorial or political control to the extent that it is no longer clear which actors can be considered legitimate.

In addition to criminal groups, civilians are increasingly being armed in the Arab conflict zone. The small arms smuggling market in many countries of the region is witnessing a boom amid economic and financial collapse, high rates of theft, and the state's failure to prevent crime and political violence. Civilians buy rifles and other small arms to protect themselves and their families from perceived threats. In Iraq and Lebanon, for example, security forces have failed to curb robberies and tribal conflicts over the past years, and so-called (household weapons) have become increasingly popular. According to the Small Arms Survey Project, nearly 20 percent of Iraq's population owned a gun in 2021, with the figure in Lebanon at 32%[26].

As for the lack of transparency, according to a source from the National Commission for the Collection and Control of Illicit Arms (CNCCAI) in Niger, the OBJ-006 - the Nigerian AK-47 - is increasingly widespread on the black market in neighboring northern Nigeria. During 2021, at least 4 AK-000 rifles manufactured in Nigeria were seized, in contrast to ten thousand weapons from Cameroon or Libya, which indicates the lack of political will to provide seizure data to specialized authorities. As well as the spread of weapons such as the AK-47 in the hands of Boko Haram terrorists or bandits and insurgents in the north and south of the country, Chinese, Hungarian, Albanian, or even made in Nigeria. In February 2022, a cargo ship bound for Guyana from Italy, which inexplicably stopped in Dakar, contained three containers of unauthorized Italian ammunition[27].

The Arab region and Africa did not become the world's illegal weapons depot overnight; factors such as widespread corruption, facilitation of the theft of government stocks, state-driven arms dumping, lack of oversight mechanisms, limited law enforcement capabilities, and international cooperation all contributed to the most destabilizing actors in the region exploiting the proliferation of weapons. It has continued the vicious cycle of conflict that has plagued the region for decades, negatively impacting the ability of these countries to implement the Sustainable Development Goals collectively, Goal 16.

---

[26] - Up in arms: The Middle East as the world's illicit arms depot, Global Initiative, 24 Mar 2023, link,
https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/middle-east-illicit-arms-trafficking-ocindex/

[27] من أين تأتي الأسلحة غير المشروعة المستخدمة في أفريقيا؟ -Le Journal de L' Afrique، الرابط، 9 مارس 2022، https://bit.ly/3qoU4Xt

Increasing Rates of Crime and Terrorism

Although countries are committed to mechanisms for tracking small arms and light weapons, whether the United Nations Coordination of Action on Small Arms (CASA), the Small Arms and Light Weapons Strategy (SALW), or various regional security frameworks, regional and international actors do not tend to exercise any control over arms flows. It is in the interest of the world's largest arms exporter to keep demand for weapons high. For the United States, Russia, China, and other great powers, the region is an ideal market for arms deals, which contributes to high rates of crime and terrorism.

In Mexico, it is almost impossible for citizens to purchase a gun legally. According to the government, the only firearms store is owned by the military, and it issues fewer than 50 permits annually-. But that hasn't stopped millions of firearms from circulating across the country, with an estimated 200,000 firearms being smuggled illegally from the United States every year, according to the US government. Between 70% and 90% of firearms found at crime scenes in Mexico are from the United States (according to the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs). In 2020, there were 24,617 homicides with a firearm in Mexico[28], which exacerbates the number of deaths.

As for Nigeria, the Armed Conflict Locations and Events Data Project revealed that attacks launched by bandit gangs between 2018 and 2022 increased by 731%, from 124 to 1,031 incidents. It also reported that bandits killed about 13,485 people from 2010 to May 2023. The United Nations International Organization for Migration revealed that bandits forced hundreds of thousands to flee their homes in the northwestern region between 2018 and 2020. Many factors make Nigeria's northwestern region vulnerable to attacks, including poorly managed security resources, conflicts between herders and farmers, illegal gold mining, deteriorating livelihoods for people in rural areas, mismanagement of Nigeria's international borders, weak law enforcement, and failures of security intelligence.

Poverty is also considered one of the main factors that cause women to resort to arms smuggling. From December 2022 to February 2023, the Zamfara State Police arrested many female arms smugglers on charges of supplying weapons and ammunition to bandits. The recent increase in the number of women involved in arms trafficking is

---

28 - رحلة تهريب الاسلحة من تكساس إلى ميكسيكو..هكذا تساهم الولايات المتحدة في قتل المكسيكيين، الميادين، 10 يوليو 2023، الرابط، https://bit.ly/48A9hWT

linked to the economic downturn in the region, as it severely affects women and prevents them from obtaining their basic rights[29].

As for Yemen, in addition to all the violations affecting the Yemenis themselves, which intersect with the inability to achieve sustainable development goals, such as increasing poverty rates, the collapse of education and health, and widespread malnutrition, the Houthi militia added another violation of maritime safety, thanks to the smuggled weapons and ammunition, in addition to their seizure of many weapons from the Yemeni army. The Houthi militia subjected commercial ships in the Red Sea to continuous terrorist attacks that pose a threat to 13% of the volume of international trade movement annually off Houthi-controlled areas. According to estimates attributed to official data, several violations and crimes were committed during militia activity in maritime piracy off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden; it amounts to war crimes in violation of international law, local laws, and international agreements and treaties ratified by Yemen. According to local reports, the maritime crimes committed by the militia amounted to about 504 violations, including 183 cases of targeting international commercial cargo ships and military ships and 49 cases of using the Red Sea beaches to smuggle Iranian weapons to Yemen. It also recorded the targeting of Yemeni and Saudi ports with about 17 violations, the planting of 192 Houthi mines in the waters of the Red Sea, and the carrying out of 63 attacks on fishermen and the looting of their property[30].

The Houthi militia is considered among the most heinous terrorist groups, which now pose a real danger to Yemen and the region in general. It is not concerned with the Yemeni state, its security and stability, or the Yemeni people and their needs, especially in light of their continued access to military aid and weapons of various types and the strengthening of the strength of their militias, which would double their danger to Yemen and the entire region[31].

Through this presentation, the achievements of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development have been halted, and the devastating effects of explosive weapons on civilians, homes, facilities, and civilian infrastructure threaten several global goals, including achieving food security, eliminating poverty, and establishing peaceful societies

---

29 - اتجار النساء بالأسلحة يتزايد في شمال غرب نيجيريا، موقعadf-magazine ، 29أغسطس 2023، الرابط، https://bit.ly/3PZPadq
30 - خطر مليشيا الحوثيين على الأمن القومي والإقليمي والملاحة البحرية، الاصلاح نت، 28 فبراير 2022، الرابط، -https://alislah ye.net/news_details.php?lng=arabic&sid=8962
31 - قادة الامم المتحدة واللجنة الدولية يحثّون على تكثيف الدعم العالمي لحماية المدنيين من استخدام الاسلحة المتفجرة في المناطق المأهولة، اللجنة الدولية للصليب الأحمر ، 14 نوفمبر 2022، الرابط، https://bit.ly/3t8R96y

where no one is marginalized. High levels of explosive ordnance contamination resulting from using these weapons in populated areas also threaten the lives of residents and hamper reconstruction efforts long after the end of hostilities, and Large, recurring, and long-term displacement also poses serious risks to the health, security, and well-being of populations. The use of explosive weapons in populated areas, especially weapons with wide-area effects, is fundamentally inconsistent with basic human rights and threatens the future of entire generations.

Hence, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights affirms that adopting the Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 16, concerned with promoting peaceful and comprehensive societies for sustainable development, is important for integrating peace into the general policy framework not only of the United Nations but of the international community as a whole. So, countries and peoples need to better understand the links between peace, conflict, and sustainable development, especially in the absence of meaningful goals or indicators to track progress toward achieving a peaceful society and work to significantly reduce all forms of violence and related deaths everywhere, as stated in the Goal 16.1 and significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows as stated in Goal 16.4.

Recommendations:

- Adopting conflict-sensitive strategies to manage the risks posed by conflict and fragility, namely recognition, avoidance, risk mitigation, peacebuilding, and learning.
- Taking advantage of all available means to bridge the gap in the level of humanitarian response and enhance its effectiveness.
- Providing emergency humanitarian or development assistance and improving communities facing disasters, crises, and social, economic, and environmental challenges.
- Develop and implement action plans with specific, concrete, and timetabled activities to establish sustainable actions to protect children from the effects of conflict.
- Parties to conflicts and states must comply with their obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law, especially those calling for a ban on the supply of weapons to armed groups to limit the duration of the conflict.
- Resolving or preventing conflicts and supporting countries in post-conflict phases, including ensuring that women are integrated into peace-building processes and establishing the state foundations.

16

- Taking further effective measures and procedures, by international law, to remove obstacles that prevent the full realization of the right to self-determination for peoples under colonialism and foreign occupation that continue to negatively affect their economic and social development and their environment as well.
- Engaging civil society in approving and implementing the reform strategy, evaluating its effects, and formulating and implementing measures related to services, education, health, housing, and decent work.