Ms Katherine Prizeman  
United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs  
New York  

16 April 2020

Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on problems arising from the accumulation of conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus – Second Session

Dear Ms Prizeman,

The HALO Trust welcomes progress to date under the informal consultative process mandated by General Assembly Resolution 72/55, ‘Problems arising from the accumulation of conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus.’ We are grateful to Germany for its leadership, the role played by UNODA and UNIDIR in supporting consultations and the opportunity for expert non-governmental organisations to provide input.

HALO attaches significant importance to addressing the negative impact of poor ammunition safety and security on poverty, stability and socio-economic development. Mitigating the potential for illicit and poorly managed small arms, light weapons and ammunition to act as a driver of violence and conflict is part of HALO’s organisational strategy (2020-2025).

We submit the attached working paper in advance of the GGE’s Second Session, starting 20 April 2020. It draws on our policy, technical and programming expertise and we hope it will assist the work of the GGE. HALO looks forward to providing further input as the work of the GGE progresses.

We offer our compliments to the Chair and wish the GGE success in the next stage of its work.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Loughran  
Senior Policy & Advocacy Advisor
A. Progress in Addressing Ammunition in Surplus

1. The 2008 Group of Government Experts marked a turning point for considering and addressing the impact of ammunition as part of the global disarmament agenda. Since then, HALO has seen a growing awareness and acknowledgement by states of the need to address ammunition in surplus. This has been driven by a shared desire to prevent its detrimental impact on stability and sustainable development. In our assessment, this has been enabled by several, interconnected factors:

   a) The work by civil society organisations to monitor and report on Unplanned Explosions at Munitions Sites has played a central role in understanding their frequency and geographic spread, as well as their human, socio-economic and political consequences.

   b) The elaboration of the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines (IATG) under the UN SaferGuard programme, and as part of a General Assembly framework, has brought together good practice under one guiding umbrella. It has provided a valuable structure to support national approaches, as well as harmonised international cooperation and assistance.

   c) An established portfolio of international cooperation and assistance projects aiming to reduce risk of unplanned explosions and ammunition diversion has demonstrated that short-term results can be achieved even in challenging contexts. Technical assistance provided by expert non-governmental organisations (NGOs) has played a key role in this achievement.

   d) An increasing body of civil society-led research based on conflict tracing has provided insight into diversion trends and the illicit trade. It has confirmed a general assessment that the illicit market is fuelled by battlefield capture as well as diversion from state stocks. With that in mind, we welcome the paper GGE/PACAS/2020/3, ‘Diversion Typology’, submitted on behalf of the Chair of the GGE.

2. Issues relating to ammunition and its management continue to attract heightened political sensitivity, generally to a greater degree than small arms and light weapons. While policy divergence continues at the multilateral level, increasing willingness by many states to discuss their national challenges and international cooperation partnerships to address them has enabled more open and practical policy discussion.

3. The period since the 2008 GGE has also seen increased policy focus on the ammunition provisions within relevant regional and sub-regional disarmament frameworks and instruments. In many cases, such frameworks offer wide-ranging and legally binding measures to address the negative impact of ammunition at the regional and sub-regional level. We agree with the observation in the working paper submitted by Ghana that these provisions are not always drawn on fully at the regional and sub-regional level. The GGE could consider how greater use can be made of regional and sub-regional instruments. The GGE could also consider how to create platforms or forums for exchanges of views and experiences between regions and sub-regions, including the perspectives of expert organisations involved in cooperation and assistance.
4. The informal consultations as part of the current GGE process have included important discussion around the issue of ammunition diversion and its role in fuelling instability and perpetuation of conflict. This has covered diversion of state stocks through ‘battlefield capture’, as well as diversion as the result of inadequate management and control of state stockpiles outside of conflict zones. While related, the two contexts are likely to benefit from specific policy responses. This could be a useful area of focus for the GGE.

B. International Cooperation & Assistance

5. There has been a significant increase in international cooperation and assistance to address ammunition in surplus over the last five years. This has taken place primarily in the field of Physical Security and Stockpile Management (PSSM). PSSM assistance has included the identification and destruction of surplus munitions, construction of rehabilitation of explosive storehouses, introduction of quantity and separation distances and inventory management.

6. PSSM assistance has undoubtedly prevented unplanned explosions and averted devastating consequences, particularly in cases where poorly managed ammunition stockpiles were located in urban areas. Countless lives have been saved as a result. International assistance has also increased in sophistication, benefiting from the IATG. Cooperation and assistance is based increasingly on surveys that establish baselines and enable prioritisation. Assistance provided to the military also now routinely involves training of explosive storehouse managers and their oversight officers.

7. Despite the progress made, the sustainability and impact of international cooperation and assistance – especially in the field of PSSM – depends on national investment as well as political and military leadership by affected states. The focus on ‘Life Cycle Management of Ammunition’, particularly through informal meetings facilitated by Switzerland, has highlighted the interrelated factors that are essential for the sustainable national management of ammunition in surplus.

8. Promoting national political leadership and cross-government strategies to address the safety and security of ammunition at the national level should be a priority focus for the GGE. The GGE should also consider how greater synergies can be established with Rule of Law and Security Sector Reform initiatives, with a particular focus on sustainability at the national level. With that in mind, we strongly support the recommendations made in the working paper submitted by Switzerland, also on behalf of Austria and Montenegro.

9. Discussion and the work of the GGE could include particular attention to the allocation of national budgets. Meanwhile, international assistance still depends on a small number of states providing aid through annual budgets, with need far outstripping current levels of international support. The GGE should explore how the range and scale of donor and in-kind assistance can be broadened, building on and further developing existing PSSM assistance.

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