

Committee: General Assembly 1

Chair: Saindhavi Rajeshkumar (Deputy Chair)

Issue: The eradication of illegal arms trade



Research report

Dome Model United Nations 2026

Forming a Dome of international peace

DomeMUN

Research Report

Issue 2

Forum: General Assembly 1

Issue: The eradication of illegal arms trade

Name: Saindhavi Rajeshkumar

Position: Deputy Chair

Introduction

Every day, thousands of people are killed, injured or forced to leave their homes due to armed violence. The issue of illegal arms trade continues to grow, destabilising conflict-prone regions by allowing weapons to reach individuals and groups who operate outside of legal and regulatory frameworks. The total eradication of illegal arms trade requires a thorough approach that not only addresses the supply and demand for illicit weapons, but also addresses the social, economic and political conditions that enable arms trafficking operations to proceed.

Despite existing international agreements, legislation, and efforts to strengthen border control, the illegal arms trade continues to exploit weaknesses in governments, law enforcement and international cooperation. This in turn undermines efforts to maintain peace and security. With weak governance, corruption, fragile state structures and geopolitical rivalries, the need for international cooperation is greater than ever.

Definition of Key Terms

Illegal arms trade

The unauthorised import, export, sale, delivery or transfer of firearms, ammunition, and military equipment across national borders.

Illicit Manufacturing

Manufacturing or assembling firearms from parts and components illicitly trafficked or without a licence or authorisation.

Black Market

An economic system where the buying and selling of goods or services takes place outside of government control or legal channels, often operating through physical meetups or online websites such as the dark web.

Grey Market

An unofficial but not completely illegal system in which products are bought and sold.

Straw Purchasing

The act of buying a firearm on behalf of another person while lying on official paperwork about who the true buyer is.

Arms Brokering

The act of arranging, facilitating, or negotiating potential arms transactions between a supplier and a buyer. Illegal brokers often orchestrate the logistics behind international grey market transfers.

General Overview

Illegal arms trade is a multi-billion-dollar global illicit market where small arms, light weapons, and ammunition are manufactured, transferred, and diverted illegally across borders. Ungoverned areas remain a hotspot for trading illicit arms, fuelling criminal activity more than ever.

Many methods of illegal trading exist. One common method is the use of a 'straw purchaser', someone who is eligible to buy a weapon on behalf of another person who is not. Licit production can be the cause of illegal trade as well, as legally manufactured weapons regularly find their way onto black markets. Weapons can be diverted through leakage from arms manufacturers, theft, shipping through dangerous routes, stockpile mismanagement, corruption among officials, or fake exports to another country from where the weapons are then bought by criminals.

Supply and Demand

Instances of large-scale armed conflict, whether regional or international, high levels of crime or violence, a lack of trust in the security sector and loopholes all increase the demand for illicit arms.

Countries with less effective regulations and enforcement measures are more likely to experience large container shipments for illicit weapons.

Role of international cooperation

International cooperation plays a major role in the eradication of illegal arms trading, as arms trafficking frequently takes place across borders because of weak regulations in some states. No country can single-handedly eradicate illicit arms trading; countries need to come together to agree on regulations that prevent further illicit international transfers.

International cooperation also facilitates the exchange of information: law-enforcement agencies can share information about suspected traffickers or shipments that may happen. Border control can also improve with further cooperation from other states as they can strengthen inspections, improve procedures and cooperate in investigating any suspicious shipments. Joint operations make it more difficult for traffickers to exploit weaknesses. To conclude, cooperation between nations is the most important factor to bring a stop to illegal arms trading.

Major Parties Involved

United States

The United States is the largest arms exporter in the world, holding a share of approximately 42% of global arms exports in 2021–25. This is more than four times the share of the closest competitor, France, with 9.8% (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute [SIPRI], 2026). The majority of US exports go to Europe or the Middle East, which means the country plays an important role in strengthening control over arms exports and preventing weapons from being diverted into illicit markets. It is important to note that the United States has not ratified the Arms Trade Treaty.

INTERPOL

INTERPOL, formally the International Criminal Police Organization, is the world's largest international police organisation. It works with 196 member countries to fight and prevent cross-border crime. INTERPOL works to track, disrupt and reduce illicit trade in firearms through global databases, cross-border cooperation and information sharing. It also manages iARMS, the Illicit Arms Records and Tracing Management System, a global database of illicit firearms, including stolen, lost and trafficked or smuggled firearms, and it analyses firearms crime data to identify trends in the routes and methods used to traffic weapons (INTERPOL, 2022).

World Customs Organization (WCO)

The World Customs Organization is an intergovernmental organisation that works to improve the effectiveness of customs administrations worldwide. The WCO contributes to the eradication of illegal arms trading by securing borders, running targeted operations and providing intelligence-sharing networks. It has led operations that disrupted illegal arms trade, such as Operation CALYPSO 2, carried out in the Caribbean from 24 November to 12 December 2025. In only three weeks the

operation recorded more than 500 seizures and prevented 119 firearms and 332 firearm parts from reaching organised crime groups (World Customs Organization, 2026). The operation shows how much the WCO values international cooperation.

Relevant treaties, resolutions and reports:

- The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), 2 April 2013
- The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects, 8 December 2005 (A/RES/60/81)
- The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects, 4 December 2023 (A/RES/78/46)
- The EU Common Position, 8 December 2008 (2008/944/CFSP)

Previous attempts to solve the issue:

There have been many attempts to stop the illegal arms trade. Governments, the United Nations and law-enforcement agencies have continuously tried to combat and prevent illicit trade. Yet, despite these efforts, the illegal arms trade continues to exploit weaknesses.

United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons

In 2001, the Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons was adopted. It encourages countries to strengthen national legislation, control arms trading and cooperate internationally. However, the Programme of Action is a political framework rather than a treaty with legally binding obligations (United Nations, 2001).

The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)

Adopted in 2013, the treaty established standards and was the first legally binding international agreement to set global standards for regulating the trade of conventional weapons. While the treaty is an important step, it cannot eradicate illicit arms trading on its own. Major arms exporters have not become parties to the treaty: Russia never signed it, and the United States signed in 2013 but withdrew its signature in 2019. It is also not fully effective because it relies on individual states to implement their own national control systems to regulate the transfer of conventional arms.

Possible Solutions:

- A possible solution would be to improve the management and security of national stockpiles, so that weapons cannot be lost, stolen or diverted into illicit trade.
- Another step towards eradicating the illegal arms trade would be for Member States to strengthen their national firearm regulations, with strict screening of applicants, clear guidelines on responsible use and effective penalties for those who violate them. This would make it harder to obtain weapons through legal channels for illicit purposes and would discourage practices such as straw purchasing.
- Lastly, Member States could improve the marking, record-keeping and tracing of weapons, so that firearms found on illicit markets can be traced back to their source and cases of diversion can be investigated. Sharing this information through databases such as INTERPOL's iARMS would support this (INTERPOL, 2022).

Bibliography

Amnesty International. (2019). *Arms control*. [online] Amnesty.org. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/arms-control/>.

Council of the European Union. (2008). Council Common Position 2008/944/CFSP of 8 December 2008 defining common rules governing control of exports of military technology and equipment. [online] Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32008E0944>.

Dyer, T. (2025). *The illicit arms trade: Forever wars in the Global South | Atlas Institute for International Affairs*. [online] Atlas Institute for International Affairs. Available at: <https://atlasinstitute.org/the-illicit-arms-trade-forever-wars-in-the-global-south/>.

Geopolitical Monitor. (2011). *The illicit trade of small arms | geopolitical monitor*. [online] Available at: <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/the-illicit-trade-of-small-arms-4273/>.

INTERPOL. (2022). *Firearms - what we do*. [online] Available at: <https://www.interpol.int/Crimes/Firearms-trafficking/Firearms-what-we-do>.

OECD. (2024). *Illicit trade*. [online] Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/illicit-trade.html>.

Oktutan, N. (2026). Arms trafficking: The illicit trade in weapons and its security implications. *NATO Science for Peace and Security Series - E: Human and Societal Dynamics*. doi:10.3233/nhsdp260017.

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. (2026, March). Trends in international arms transfers, 2025 (SIPRI Fact Sheet). [online] Available at: https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2026-03/fs_2603_at_2025.pdf.

United Nations. (2001). Programme of action to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects: Adopted by the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, New York, 9–20 July 2001. [online] Available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/477974>.

United Nations General Assembly. (2023). The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects (A/RES/78/46). [online] Available at: <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/78/46>.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2018). Firearms module 4 key issues: Supply, demand and criminal motivations. [online] Available at: <https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld/en/education/tertiary/firearms/module-4/key-issues/supply--demand-and-criminal-motivations.html>.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2026). *Explainer: How the UN works to secure global trade and fight organized crime at border crossings*. [online] Available at: https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2026/January/explainer_-how-the-un-works-to-secure-global-trade-and-fight-organized-crime-at-border-crossings.html.

World Customs Organization. (2026, March 11). Caribbean Customs operation seizes rising number of illegal firearms, disrupting organized criminal networks. [online] Available at: <https://www.wcoomd.org/en/media/newsroom/2026/march/caribbean-customs-operation-seizes-rising-number-of-illegal-firearms.aspx>.