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# The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

**Committee:** The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

**Topic B:** Preventing the illegal trade of weapons through the internet

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## I. Committee Background

The purpose of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is to battle the use of illicit drugs and international crime. It was founded in 1997 through a merger between the United Nations Drug Control Programme and the Centre for International Crime Prevention. Currently, its headquarters are located in Vienna, Austria. The UNODC is currently working on educating individuals about the dangers of drug abuse and strengthening the fight against illicit drug and human trafficking. In 2015, the UNODC created the Global Act, which prevents and addresses trafficking of persons and the smuggling of migrants (GLO.ACT). This initiative is being co-funded by the European Union, which has so far donated 11 million euros (GLO. ACT, 2018). One of the most important achievements the UNODC has accomplished is the successful implementation of the Narcotics Reduction Unitized Programme (NOROUZ) in Iran. The program's main objective was to work with the government of the country in order to minimize the impact of drug use and its trafficking, in addition to the creation of educational groups and rehabilitation facilities (About, UNODC, 2018).

## II. Topic information

### A) History of Topic

The illegal trade of weapons, arms trafficking or gun running, are defined by Pennsylvania State University as the trafficking of contraband weapons and

ammunition. Over the past two decades the world has become globalized and interconnected. Knowledge, education, health and communication have never been closer and easier to obtain, especially through the use of the world wide web (internet). Although these tools are helping humanity succeed and develop, they also bring with them a number of threats and dangers which, if not controlled, can lead to serious implications. As for communication and technology, people find it more convenient to communicate, share, socialize, and sell or trade with others via the web. Taking into account that it is fast, simple and accessible, and the information shared is able to reach a potentially enormous audience while the user can remain anonymous (Ryu, ASP, 2013).

Although this source has proven to be beneficial for some, it also ensures quick and easy access for criminals of all types to go unnoticed under the law, which is why so many of them turn to the internet in order to carry out their manoeuvres. Among others, the illegal trade of weapons through the internet is a new and growing threat that started shortly after its arrival in the 1990s. Governments and law enforcement officials have thus far been unable to come up with a precise number of how many weapons are illegally sold online. This is mainly because weapons are sold with false names and addresses or on the "dark web". The dark web is a space on the internet that is only accessible through special software and passwords enabling users to operate anonymously. Due to this, law enforcement agencies are usually unable to trace buyers and sellers and in turn prevent the trade of weapons (Inside Straw Purchasing, Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, 2018).

The online market for illegal firearms is vast and exponentially growing. It was estimated that nearly a decade ago, 80 firearm auction sites and about 4,000 other sites featured guns for sale (Felon Seeks Firearm, Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, 2018). In 2016, more than 25,000 guns were for sale on only ten webpages (BBC

News, 2016). The continuous expansion of this particular subject presents a mortal threat to society since lethal weapons such as the ones being traded and sold online can turn into a major tragedy if in wrong hands. According to the United States' (US) Department of Justice Special Agent Mark Kraft, individuals who purchase weapons online illegally “usually know nothing about the weapons they claim to have bought.” Moreover, studies show that 62 percent of private gun sellers agreed to sell a weapon to a buyer who said he/she probably could not pass a government background check. These statistics are worrying since regardless of each country’s local and national laws, virtually none are unaffected by firearm violence. The evidence that states that online sales pose a threat to public safety is mounting. Sales conducted over the internet have been connected to mass shootings at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University in the United States, the murder of police officers, illegal sales to minors, domestic gun trafficking operations and South American drug cartels (Inside Straw Purchasing, Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, 2018).

Every country has its own laws regarding gun commerce. In some countries like Japan, gun sales are mostly banned. In the United Kingdom, gun laws are very strict but permitted with certain requirements. The individual must possess a Shotgun Certificate or a Firearm Certificate. In addition, semi-automatic weapons are prohibited in both of these countries. Gun ownership in Canada is also highly regulated. Gun owners must have a license that includes “third-party references, take a safety training course and pass a background check with a focus on mental, criminal and addiction histories.” On the other hand, in other countries like the United States, weapon commerce is regulated by the market and almost any adult can acquire a wide variety of arms including high power and/or automatic weapons (Hickey, Business Insider, 2013).

According to a United States government spokesperson Bradley Buckles, "If people are inclined to break the law, the internet provides them with more sources." Regardless of the laws that each country may apply upon gun selling, the internet and the facilities for fast and easy communication that it holds make it easier for criminals and those who are tempted to break the law to do so. Everyday, arms trafficking is conducted among anonymous criminals through thousands of online sites. Criminal buyers that once had to purchase in person can now prowl hundreds of thousands of listings to unscrupulous sellers. Nowadays, negotiations and illegal trade agreements can be done by a phone call or email. Therefore, this topic has become a growing concern all around the globe (Inside Straw Purchasing, Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, 2018).

## **B) Current Issues**

**El Salvador:** In 2015, over 80 percent of the assassinations carried out in El Salvador involved guns (Kinosian, Latin American Working Group, 2016). According to the United States government, 50 percent of the guns organized criminal groups use come from the major cities in El Salvador. Members of the Salvadoran military sell stolen weapons through the black market. Human rights organizations claim that the military has been directly involved in arms trafficking. That said, El Salvador ironically does have strong gun control laws. For example, all buyers must pass background checks administered by the police, before picking up their gun they must pass a safety and proficiency course, and citizens cannot own automatic rifles, among other measures. Even with these strict laws, El Salvador has an extensive and easily accessible black market where buyers can find firearms and explosives of all shapes, sizes and origins, with little interference from law enforcement (El Salvador, Gun Policy, 2018). Every year, the nation's citizens spend 20 million US dollars on small weapons from the legal

market, and two to three times that on the black market (Kinosian, Latin American Working Group, 2016).

**Colombia:** This country has one of the highest homicide rates in the world. Most of those killings involve firearms. The estimated total number of guns in Columbia, both licit and illicit, held by civilians is 3,200,000. The right to private gun ownership is not guaranteed by law for which the number of licensed gun owners is nearly 900,000. In addition, civilians are not allowed to possess pistols and revolvers of a calibre superior to 9.6 millimetres. The penalty for the unlawful possession of a firearm is 12 years in prison. Much of the illegal arms sold in the country are not purchased online. According to the UNODC, the majority of arms brought into the country arrive via illegal smuggling rings that operate across the nation's land border (Calvani and Liller, UNODC, 2006).

**Uruguay:** Uruguay ranks as one of the safest countries in Latin America. It is estimated that around one million firearms — both registered and unregistered — circulate in this small nation of around 3.4 million people. In 2011, 6,543 legal weapons entered the country, including 3,128 pistols and 689 handguns — up from 1,485 weapons entering Uruguay in 2007. The illegal sale and trade of weapons online has not been a major concern for this nation. All incoming weapons, including ammunition, is tightly controlled by the government. Government agencies also monitor online activity and flag and investigate any suspicious purchases involving weapons. Furthermore, in order to legally possess a firearm, citizens must show a special certificate which details where, when and who they purchased the weapon from (Uruguay, Gun Policy, 2018).

**Netherlands:** According to the National Threat Report by the College of Attorneys General, efforts to stop the illegal trade of arms in the Netherlands has been largely ineffective. A large number of firearms remain in circulation and are increasingly used by criminals, the report states. A significant proportion of these weapons come from

eastern European countries where disarmed firearms are sold as souvenirs. The dark web is the most common marketplace. Guns are mailed in parts and individuals assemble them when they arrive. In response, police chief Dick Schouten, responsible for tackling illegal firearms in the Netherlands, has called for "unambiguous European legislation" on the firearms trade (Pieters, NL Times, 2017).

**Czech Republic:** According to Article 9 of the Diplomacy Protocol of the Czech Republic, "firearms and their ammunition imported, possessed and carried in the Czech Republic on a temporary basis or moved through the Czech Republic in transit must be accompanied by a transit waybill." Transit waybills are issued by embassies and consulates of the Czech Republic and by the Police Presidium of the country. Visitors importing firearms and ammunition on a temporary basis for hunting and sport shooting purposes may obtain the waybill from the police at the border crossing point. That said, the Czech Republic, along with Montenegro, Slovakia, Serbia and Romania, has been a major source of illegal weapons on the dark web. In fact, since the Syrian conflict began in 2012, a large amounts of illegal weapons have been sold online and exported from the Czech Republic to rebel and terrorist groups operating in Syria. Since the weapons are often sold in parts, little has been done to prevent or stop their shipment via courier or regular mail services (Lu, Bustle, 2015).

**Russia:** In this nation, all individuals purchasing a gun must obtain a licence via a series of special gun possession courses. Also, guns can only be bought by people 18 years and over. This licence must be renewed every five years. During the first five years, gun purchases are limited to low powered arms. After, rifles may be purchased. Rifles and shotguns less than 800 millimetres long are prohibited, as well as automatic firearms and those with more than 10 cartridge capacity. Handguns are generally not allowed. Moreover, no one can own more than 10 guns unless they are part of a gun club. As of

January 2018, Russia has not released official information related to illegal arms sales over the internet (Russia, Gun Policy, 2018).

### **C) UN Action**

The UNODC has had various meetings that resulted in the creation of the convention called the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking of Firearms. Its aim is to “counter the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts, components and ammunition at the global level.” This convention is significant because it is the only legally binding document related to this topic (The Firearms Protocol, UNODC, 2018). Another convention established by the UN is the International Small Arms Control Standards (ISACS), which was agreed upon at the Second Review Conference on the United Nations Programme of Action on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons. The objective of the standards are to help ensure that Member States put into place effective controls over the full life-cycle of small arms and light weapons. While these have been enacted, there still has not been a successful solution in order to address the topic. The most recent solutions brought up by the UN have been to reduce the existing stockpiles, reduce the supply of weapons and to monitor the internet and possibly the dark web (UNODA, 2018).

### **III. Conclusion**

The sale and trade of illegal weapons online has become an urgent problem over the past two decades. These weapons are bought and sold on thousands of unregulated websites, most of which provide arms to criminals and terrorist organizations. These sales put the lives of people in danger and are difficult to trace once a crime has been perpetrated. While almost all countries around the world have gun laws, very few effectively address this issue. Therefore, countries and the UN must

work together to create an action plan that will effectively stop this issue from increasing. Only then can countries truly focus on all of their resources on addressing problems related to legal weapon sales and crimes involving arms.

#### **IV. Essential Questions**

1. Does your country have any laws that regulate the sale of weapons online? If so, have they been successful? Why or why not?
2. What is the dark web and how has it contributed to increase this issue?
3. How has the illegal trade of weapons through the internet impacted your nation?
4. Is your country a source or hub for illegal arms deals via the web? If so, what has contributed to this?
5. What is the UN doing to address this issue?
6. Is your country a member of any conventions or agreements established to target this issue? If so, which ones?
7. What other international organizations are working to solve this matter? Is your country working with any of them? If so, which ones?
8. Which weapons are primarily sold via the internet? How are they usually shipped to buyers in order to avoid detection?

#### **V. Resources**

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