

Sixth Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty Geneva, 17-21 August 2020

General statement

Mr President

Saferworld recognises the extremely difficult circumstances with which the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) Presidency, Secretariat and all other officeholders have had to contend over the past six months in taking the current cycle of the ATT process forward, and is grateful for all the efforts that have been made in this regard.

We are, collectively, in a situation where normal practice has become impossible and little by way of precedent exists for managing this type of international process in a time of a pandemic. With states facing a variety of challenges to their healthcare systems and overall administrative capacity, we fully appreciate the challenges of trying to maintain momentum while at the same time facilitating full and fair access.

We share the concerns felt by others that managing the Sixth Conference of States Parties (CSP6) to the ATT on a solely written basis is problematic, although we also appreciate that whatever the approach taken, this would have inevitably come with its own issues and points of criticism.

We do not, however, see this current approach as a sustainable model in the event that the pandemic continues, and while it may be sufficient for the moment to focus on simply maintaining the existing functionality of the ATT regime – as is reflected by the bulk of the draft decisions circulated in July – in future, a meaningful ATT process needs more than just a “holding pattern”. Given that the end of the pandemic is not yet in sight we may be faced with the current difficulties for some time to come. We therefore hoped to have seen indications in statements or in the draft decisions as to how the ATT process will be managed into the future, in the event that the COVID-19 threat is undiminished. We call on the Secretariat, the Presidency and other officeholders, with the support of all stakeholders, to address this scenario as a matter of priority.

Saferworld has engaged as best it can in the circumstances with the work that has taken place over the last year in the different Working Groups, including by responding to the documents of the Working Group circulated by the ATT Secretariat in April 2020, and the Presidency paper [‘Response to Transparency and exchange of information: Its role in the prevention of diversion’](#).

In the interests of brevity, we do not propose to reprise these in detail here. They can however be [accessed here](#), and they elaborate on some of the points raised below.

One area of concern that is mentioned in our responses, and that we feel merits repetition here, is with respect to the ATT process and public transparency. Promoting transparency, lest we forget, is identified explicitly in Article 1 as a purpose of the Treaty.

We have noted a disturbing reduction in transparency surrounding the ATT, which precedes the pandemic but has continued since. While we recognise that COVID-19 is placing major additional burdens on already overstretched public administrations, it cannot be allowed to become an excuse for advancing agendas or making decisions without proper oversight or recognition of the need to sustain and further build proper transparency. It is critical that States Parties are vigilant in this regard, and work proactively to maximise public transparency in their own practice and to encourage and support others to do the same.

Examples of this worrying trend include:

- Falling levels of annual reporting as required under Article 13.3 (as a proportion of States Parties with reporting obligations).
- An increasing proportion of initial and annual Reports being placed on the restricted section of the ATT website.
- A growing conflation of two distinct terms – ‘information-sharing’ and ‘transparency’ – whereby information sharing among States Parties is being presented as if it were the same as being fully transparent.
- Two tiers of the proposed three-tier approach to diversion (the use of the information exchange platform, the informal discussion meetings, and the Working Group on Effective Treaty Implementation discussions) being open only to States Parties.
- Repeated encouragements in the Summary Report of the 6 February 2020 [meeting of the Working Group on Transparency and Reporting](#) for states to share information on the exchange platform/the restricted part of the ATT website.
- Responses (by States Parties and others) to the documents of the Working Groups and the President not being placed in the public domain, while even the identity of those who have provided responses is withheld. These have been the only opportunities between the February week of Preparatory meetings and the current round of written statements for CSP6 for stakeholders to publicly receive the comments of others on the issues being addressed by, for example, the ATT Working Groups. We communicated our preference that all responses, including Saferworld’s, be made publicly available but did not receive any reply.
- Draft Decision 13 establishing the Diversion Information Exchange Forum (DIEF), whereby not only are the deliberations of this proposed forum to be held behind closed doors, the Terms of Reference are also to be kept secret (for more on this please see Saferworld’s Statement on Draft Decision 13).