



**PERMANENT MISSION OF SIERRA LEONE TO
THE UNITED NATIONS AT GENEVA**

CSP7 Side Event

**Interactive Panel of Experts on the potential of parliamentary processes
to advance the universalization of the ATT**

2 September 2021

Virtual Meeting

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to co-organize and participate in this meeting discussing the potential of parliamentary processes to advance the universalization of the ATT with our partner, Inter Parliamentary Union. As the president of the 7th conference of states party to the Arms Trade treaty, and co-chair of the Working Group on Treaty Universalization, it is my great pleasure to support this project.

This project aiming at engaging Parliaments in the universalization of the Arms Trade Treaty is most welcomed by my Presidency. The core task of treaty universalization need not be achieved solely by working group and stakeholders' engagement with the executive branch of governments. Direct interaction with the Parliaments of States that are not yet a party to the ATT is an alternative innovative way to move this task forward and meaningfully complement our current outreach strategy.

Our understanding of the specific roadblocks that are keeping States from joining the ATT framework is incomplete, and while a lot has been achieved, there are still 80 States that are not yet members of the ATT. As President of the Seventh Conference of States Parties to the ATT, a priority issue for Sierra Leone has been strengthening the ATT through increasing the number of States Parties. Since coming into office, and despite the restrictions imposed by the covid-19 pandemic, the Presidency has undertaken a number of activities related to Treaty universalization. Sierra Leone's

President issued letters to his counterparts in States that are not yet ATT-States Parties encouraging them to join the ATT. Following this, I held bilateral meetings and hand-delivered the letters to 24 States. A further 29 letters were directly sent to their corresponding Diplomatic Missions or Consular Offices.

In addition, my Presidency has been working on a project to engage Members of Parliaments in the universalization of the ATT. To kick off the project in a concrete manner, a joint letter signed by me, in my capacity as president of the CSP7, and IPU Secretary General, Mr. Martin Chungong, requesting parliamentarians to raise awareness about the Treaty and generate a constructive dialogue on the impacts of the illicit flows of Small Arms and Light Weapons has been sent to 80 Parliaments of countries that have not joined the ATT. This effort yielded positive feedback and marked the beginning of our efforts to raise awareness about the ATT in Parliaments.

Parliaments are indeed the bridge between populations and governments. Their capacity to advocate and legislate for societies free of armed violence is needed more than ever in the context of Treaty Universalization. Through this project we aim to Strengthen capacities in Parliaments, along with opinion makers and national experts in championing the principles and objectives of ATT and raise public knowledge of the ATT provisions and principles.

Throughout my mandate as president of the CSP7, I have learned that the reasons for non-participation in the treaty are multiple, complex, and often interlinked. While speaking directly with countries concerning their progress towards joining the ATT and where they are encountering challenges, one common theme has emerged, which is the need for cooperation and assistance. Achieving the objectives of the ATT requires ensuring that all States Parties have the necessary resources to effectively implement the Treaty. In addition, some countries expressed reservations regarding joining the Treaty due to:

- Volatile neighbourhoods and the security concerns posed by adjacent countries that have not yet joined the Treaty
- Bureaucratic hurdles, particularly changes in the composition of the legislature and key executive offices, lack of know-how to access the resources of the ATT framework, delaying the domestic ratification process

- A view, which at every opportunity I tried to debunk, that the Treaty will impair the ability to acquire arms for legitimate national defence purposes.

These challenges are compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, which will have a long-term socio-economic and political impact on many countries.

Working together with Parliamentarians, other public opinion-makers and technical experts in these 80 countries will provide alternative channels to facilitate the necessary assistance, better communicate the benefits of joining the ATT, mainly its potential to mitigate the harmful impact of illicit weapons proliferation.

As you know, as a result of our bilateral engagements and work on treaty universalization, the Gambia announced its decision to accede to the ATT as the last ECOWAS member state at the opening session of the CSP7. Through this project, we will double our efforts and work with the Gambian Parliament (National Assembly) to facilitate the ratification of the treaty in the near future.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate Sierra Leone's support for this project in engaging Parliaments in the universalization of the Arms Trade Treaty. This is an inclusive and forward-looking project that has the potential to secure a long-lasting impact.

I encourage you to support this initiative, the experts and the panel will answer your questions and provide all the relevant documentation.

Thank you for your attention.