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

On 2 September 2021 the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Sierra Leone to the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) co-organized a side-event on the occasion of the 7th Conference of State Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty (CSP7).

The event inscribed itself in continuation of previous efforts to raise awareness about the ATT framework amongst Parliaments of non-member states – notably a letter co-signed by the President of the CSP7, H.E. Mr. Lansana Gberie, and the Secretary General of the IPU, Mr. Martin Chungong, that was sent to over 80 presidents of parliaments of non-member states. In his address delivered at the Conference, the Secretary General of the IPU drew on these efforts and welcomed the [support statements](#) presented by the President of the Conference for the project aiming at engaging parliaments in the universalization of the Arms Trade Treaty. This interactive panel of experts discussed the potential of parliamentary processes to advance the universalization of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and focused on a parliamentary project to this effect.

Panellists (in order of appearance):

- Ms. Patricia Torsney, Permanent Observer of the IPU to the United Nations Headquarters in New York, former Canadian MP
- H.E. Mr. Lansana Gberie, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations Office at Geneva, and President of the 7th Conference of State Parties to the ATT
- Mr. Saber Chowdhury, Member of Parliament of the Parliament of Bangladesh, honorary IPU President
- Mr. Patrick Morlai Koroma, Minister-Counsellor of the Permanent Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations Office at Geneva
- Dr. Philipp Fluri, Expert on democratic oversight of the defence and security sectors
- Mr. Ravinder Pal Singh, Expert on security sector governance and arms control
- Ms. Laurence Marzal, IPU Senior Programme Officer, Peace and International Security

Ms. P. Torsney moderated the session. She gave a brief overview of the [parliamentary project](#) aimed at raising the interest and commitment of parliaments in advancing ATT universalization. The project's parliaments-based approach seeks to encourage and enable national parliaments to promote ATT ratification. It places emphasis on the need to raise awareness in parliamentary circles and, in so doing, increase their efforts in promoting ATT ratification. The project highlights the manifest advantages of the ATT framework and the lessons learned from the successful parliamentary steps that had been taken towards ATT universalization. The project aims to identify, discuss and record the specific roadblocks to joining the ATT which would then be addressed at the national level. Country-specific roadmaps for parliamentary action towards ATT ratification would be drafted.

H.E. Mr. L. Gberie took part through a pre-recorded video [statement](#). He restated his support and appreciation for the IPU's efforts towards ATT universalization and applauded the approach taken in the parliamentary project. He underlined the many roadblocks to ATT universalization such as volatile neighbourhoods and security concerns posed by adjacent countries; bureaucratic hurdles to ATT implementation and various legislative, executive, and framework-related difficulties; as well as the misconception that the ATT framework was a disarmament treaty that would affect a nation's ability to acquire arms for legitimate purposes. Concluding on the importance of parliamentary processes in the implementation of UN treaties, he encouraged the participants of the side event to support the project.

Mr. S. Chowdhury welcomed the project and stressed the importance of parliamentarians in a multitude of implementation processes. He insisted that parliamentarians held a unique position – they were the bridge between the population and the executive and were thus best placed to relate to and convey the problems encountered in their respective constituencies. They were also a key partner in reshaping people's understanding of the issue of illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) proliferation. Building on his experience as an MP from Bangladesh, a nation that had signed but not yet ratified the ATT, he argued that the political role of parliamentarians was to exert their influence in the ATT ratification processes and propose implementation methods adapted to the citizens. He concluded by stressing that it was the duty of parliamentarians to rid societies of the plague of illicit firearms and, by doing so, to lay a solid and secure foundation on which societies, communities, and nations could thrive.

Mr. P.H. Morlai Koroma echoed the words of H.E. Mr. L. Gberie, and welcomed the project as a useful addition to the task of ATT universalization. He highlighted the need to incorporate as broad a number of stakeholders as possible when addressing the issue of SALW proliferation. The example of Gambia which, following the IPU-CSP7 letter urging countries to adhere to the Treaty, had earlier announced its desire to join the ATT, was confirmation that the project was innovative and forward-looking in helping rid societies of illicit SALW proliferation.

Mr. R.P. Singh reiterated that parliamentary involvement in the universalization processes was appreciated not only by the panel but also by CSP7. United Nations representatives at CSP7 had also welcomed the project. Regarding the project itself, it was to be carried out over two years during which a series of up to 12 online workshops would be held in 8 regions. The workshops were planned for parliamentarians of States that are not yet party to the ATT, as well as delegations of national, regional, and international experts. The aim was to identify and address the reasons for non-participation in the Treaty. A detailed plan on the roadmap for parliamentary action would be established during each webinar. The dialogue and debates would help obtain a better understanding of the unique roadblocks keeping nations from partaking in the ATT framework. There was a need for sustainable efforts to build capacity within countries to support arms control processes, to better the lives and futures of citizens.

Mr. P. Fluri commented on the methodology, outcomes, and expectations of the project. Referring to outcomes, the project aimed to create a thorough repository of roadblocks to ATT participation and subsequent parliamentary practices needed to overcome them. It would provide interested parties and parliamentarians with an angle of approach to address illicit weapons proliferation. Regarding the methodology, having explored the positive aspects of online interactions, he concluded that it was justified to conduct most of the project online. In terms of risks, parliaments not willing to adhere to the Treaty would be stimulated to do so by involving civil society, academic and mediatic stakeholders in the interactive process of the workshops.

Ms. L. Marzal, expanded on the choice to build the approach to ATT universalization around the topic of human security and on the need for national ownership of solutions to illicit proliferation of SALW. Such proliferation was a complex issue that consistently affected populations, spread fear and deeply impacted the future of millions. The IPU had made a long-lasting commitment to work towards the eradication of illicit arms flows. Concretely, the 114th IPU Assembly had adopted a [resolution](#) on strengthening control of trafficking in SALW and their ammunition and in 2020 the IPU had contributed to the parliamentary handbook [Assuring our common future](#) that, among other, presents good parliamentary practices to address illicit SALW flows.

The interaction between the panel of experts and the participants was productive and insightful. Multiple points were raised, including on the structure, costs, and methods of the project. The role of parliamentarians was discussed in the light of Mr. Chowdhury's statement. The topic of human rights and freedom from fear in one's community was raised in the context of the impacts of illicit SALW proliferation especially on youth and women. Emphasis was placed on the humanitarian potential of the parliamentary project which focuses on the intersection between human rights and ATT universalization. The aim is to minimize the human cost of illicit weapons proliferation, advance the sustainable development goals, and limit conflict escalation.

Main takeaways:

- The project's potential to expand ATT universalization was well exposed and appreciated by the audience. The role of parliamentarians in ATT universalization is undisputable as was made evident from the interventions of the panellists and from the interactions with the participants.
- The project gathered interest in both parliamentary and executive spheres. Looking ahead, the event served as a preliminary testing ground for IPU's approach. The support received will allow the IPU to further interact with stakeholders to raise the necessary funds to carry out the project. Further interaction, in addition to that already underway, with parliamentarians and Permanent Missions to the United Nations are planned.
- Finally, the most important conclusion that can be drawn from this panel discussion is that the parliamentary project would help overcome many of the shortcomings of traditional treaty ratification processes. It would help achieve a better integration of parliaments in the ratification process, focus on the humanitarian impacts of the ATT, and gather and classify the roadblocks that kept countries from partaking in the ATT framework.