



**GROUP OF GOVERNMENTAL EXPERTS  
on the continuing operation and relevance of the United Nations Register of  
Conventional Arms and its further development**

**Adedeji Ebo Director and Deputy to the High Representative for  
Disarmament Affairs**

*As delivered*



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## **Agenda item 1: Opening of the session**

Distinguished experts,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you, on behalf of the United Nations Secretariat, to the 2024-2025 Group of Governmental Experts on the UN Register of Conventional Arms.

I would like to begin by congratulating you, each of you, on your nomination to participate in this Group. The diversity of experts' backgrounds in this GGE will be a tremendous asset to your discussions. The Group has at its disposal impressive expertise in international security, diplomacy, law, and military affairs. This combination will surely serve the Group well in its deliberations and, ultimately, in carrying out its mandate.

Distinguished experts,

The world is increasingly becoming a more turbulent and unstable place....unpredictable even. Geopolitical tensions, military aggression, the increased volume of production and progressive modernization of weapons systems and the lack of trust and dialogue have caused the (global) international security landscape to grow more complex, contentious, more antagonistic and challenging.

States are also scaling up arms and ammunition production capabilities, implementing large procurement plans, and developing more sophisticated conventional weapons.

Holding up our shared values is easy in times of peace and cooperation, but, as in any relationship, it is in difficult times that commitment is truly tested. Increasing evidence suggests that we are facing this test of commitment woefully. In the last years, we have seen devastating conflict and violence – in Ukraine, Lebanon, Gaza and Syria as well as in Sudan, DRC, Mozambique, Cameroon, CAR, Libya, the Sahel, Haiti and many other parts of the world. In many countries, it is a case of “no war, no peace”.

World military expenditures reached a record high of US\$2.44 trillion in 2023, which represents an increase of 27 per cent over the past 10 years. The transfer of weapons to conflict zones continues while our shared institutions and instruments to promote peace through disarmament are under strain.

Given this debilitating and antagonistic context, it would appear that we do need to be reminded that, for more than three decades, the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms has existed as a global transparency and confidence-building tool designed to prevent the excessive and destabilizing accumulation of conventional weapons, promote stability and strengthen regional and international peace and security.

In achieving the purpose of UNROCA, openness about armaments may encourage restraint in the transfer or production of arms and contribute to the prevention and reduction of misperceptions and tensions among Member States. A clear reading of the plans, military postures, and arms transfers can, indeed, prevent conflict.

The 2024-2025 GGE will examine the adaptability and flexibility of the scope of UNROCA to ensure it is fit-for-purpose. This GGE also has the opportunity to continue examining the relevance of the Register by exploring the relationship between participation, scope and use, as well as to review the operation of the Register and the work of previous GGEs, with a view to taking

that work forward. I must reiterate however that this present GGE is dealing with an even more difficult global security environment. A lot more mutual understanding and tolerance will be required of you individually and collectively.

I would therefore like to encourage you to be ambitious in this enterprise. Be bold, so that UNROCA can evolve and adapt to achieve its full potential as an instrument of peace.

Moreover, this GGE could discuss measures to promote participation in the Register and to explore potential synergies with other instruments. I am convinced that this Group is ready to meet the challenge of ensuring the relevance of the Register and increasing its participation and use.

Distinguished experts,

I am confident that you will accomplish the mission entrusted to you by the Secretary-General on behalf of the General Assembly. In particular, you will agree on pertinent recommendations that will enable UNROCA to continue to develop and to maintain its relevance as an effective transparency instrument.

The UN Office for Disarmament Affairs will do its utmost to support the Group in its endeavors.

I wish you a most fruitful discussion.

## **Agenda item 2: Election of the Chair**

With these remarks, I now invite the Group to consider item 2 on its Agenda entitled “Election of the Chairperson”.

As previously communicated to all experts by the Office for Disarmament Affairs, Minister Plenipotentiary María Jimena Schiaffino (*Schiaffino*), Director of International Security, Nuclear and Space Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship of Argentina has indicated her readiness to Chair the Group.

An email communication was circulated to all experts to this effect on 17 October 2024 initiating a silence procedure to confirm Ms. Schiaffino as Chair-designate. As no objection was received, Ms. Schiaffino has served in this capacity in the weeks prior to this first formal session of the GGE, including at the pre-session briefings held on 20 and 21 November. I understand all experts support Ms Schiaffino in this regard.

May I take it that the Group of Governmental Experts wishes to formally elect Ms. Maria Jimena Schiaffino to Chair the Group?

It is so decided. [ ► GAVEL]

I wish to congratulate Ms. Schiaffino on her election and assure her of the full support of the Office for Disarmament Affairs. I have no doubt you will steer the work of the GGE towards a positive outcome.

I now invite Ms. Schiaffino to take her seat at the podium and to assume her responsibilities as Chair.

Thank you.

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*Chair Jimena Schiaffino takes the floor*

**Distinguished experts,**

First of all, allow me to thank the Mr. Adedeji Ebo, Director and Deputy to the

High Representative for Disarmament Affairs for his remarks and for opening our session this morning.

I would also like to thank all of you for electing me as the Chair of the Group of Governmental Experts and the confidence placed in me. You can certainly count on me to do my very best to guide the Group towards a successful outcome.

This Group of Governmental Experts was established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 77/69 titled Transparency in armaments. In this resolution, the General Assembly requests the Secretary-General, with the assistance of a group of governmental experts, with the broadest possible participation, and on the basis of equitable geographical representation, to prepare a report on the continuing operation and relevance of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, including by exploring the relationship between the participation in, scope of and use of the Register, and its further development, taking into account the work of the Conference on Disarmament, relevant deliberations within the United Nations, the views expressed by Member States and the reports of the Secretary-General on the continuing operation of the Register and its further development, with a view to taking a decision at its eightieth session. I will make every effort to fulfil my responsibility to guide the work of the Group of Governmental Experts to a successful conclusion, and I

count on the cooperation and good will of all experts to fulfil the Group's mandate.

Since its establishment in 1991 through resolution 46/36 L, the Register has been a pillar in promoting transparency in international arms transfers, through the annual reports requested from Member States on their international transfers of seven main categories of conventional arms, as well as small arms and light weapons.

In my case, I would like to highlight that Argentina has a historical commitment to confidence-building measures in general, and to this Register in particular. This commitment has been reflected in the promotion of this topic in the First Committee and the General Assembly, as well as in chairing this Group, a responsibility that we have already assumed on five occasions.

In the current challenging global times, the value of transparency must be highlighted. Transparency in armaments is not an end in itself, but a key for preventing ambiguities, reducing tensions and opening ways for more effective international cooperation. It also helps to act as an early warning mechanism that facilitates preventive diplomacy. In all, as we have witnessed, transparency may contribute to build trust.

With regard to the Register, we face challenges, such as the participation of Member States, which has reached its lowest level since its creation. We must assess options to achieve greater and more effective representation of all regions, including those in conflict. Another challenge we note is the technological progress in the development of weapons, as well as the impact of artificial intelligence applied to the military domain. But above all, it is crucial to ensure that countries make more productive use of the Register.

As regards to our joint work, we will not start from scratch, but we will work on the basis of past work and recommendations of the Governmental Expert Groups that preceded us. Of particular value will be the recommendations contained in the 2022 report, which we will analyze in detail during these meetings.

Before the beginning of our session, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce the team, including the colleagues from the Secretariat, who will support my role as the Chair and the work of this GGE.

1. Mr. Sebastien Lapierre, Chief of the Conventional Arms Branch of the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs
2. Mr. Paul Holtom, Head of the Conventional Arms and Ammunition



Programme, UNIDIR and technical consultant to the GGE

3. Ms. Claudia Garcia Guiza, Political Affairs Officer with the Conventional Arms Branch of the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs

4. Ms. Leonie Hopgood, Associate Political Affairs Officer with the Conventional Arms Branch of the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs

5. Mr. Randall Tilson, Research Assistant with the Conventional Arms Branch of the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs

Thank you for the work you have already done in preparation for this GGE.

In conclusion, I would like to express my full willingness to facilitate consultations and exchanges that can lead us along the path of consensus, both in the sessions ahead and in the intersessional period. I count on your collaboration and expertise to carry out the exchanges. I am sure that the diversity of countries and specialties available here will enrich the debate.

I hope that we can have productive, frank and realistic discussions that lead to consensual recommendations in accordance with the mandate that has been given to us.

Before moving to our first substantive discussion, there are several procedural matters that require our attention.

### **Agenda item 3: Adoption of the agenda**

1. I invite you to turn to item 3 of the agenda. The Provisional Agenda was circulated previously to all experts by the Secretariat via email. Therefore, experts should be familiar with the items listed therein.

2. In accordance with the practice of past GGEs, the Provisional Agenda, once adopted, will guide our proceedings across all three GGE sessions—in December 2024, February and May 2025. This Provisional Agenda reflects the objectives contained in General Assembly resolution 77/69, which established our Group.

3. May I take it that the Group wishes to adopt the Provisional Agenda?

It is so decided. [ ► GAVEL ]

### **Agenda item 4: Methods of work**

4. I now invite you to turn to item 4 of the agenda.

5. First, I would like to draw your attention to the programme of work as circulated by the Secretariat last month.

6. As in other bodies, the programme of work is a tool that outlines a suggested structure to help guide our discussions and to make most efficient use of the time available. I have, therefore, formulated this programme of work

taking into account the range of issues to be discussed as well as the discussions within the informal Group of Friends of UNROCA and the pre-session briefings.

7. I therefore suggest that our work be generally guided by the programme of work.

8. May I take it that the Group wishes to take note of the programme of work as circulated by the Secretariat?

It is so decided. [ ► GAVEL]

9. At this stage, before introducing the methods of work, I would like to share with you my broad understanding of how the three sessions and inter-sessional work will proceed. For those who have participated in previous GGEs on UNROCA, this information will not be a surprise. However, I think it could be helpful to provide some of my expectations for our progress between now and 16 May 2025.

10. For those participating for the first time, this first session is sometimes compared to a brainstorming session. We consider the recommendations from the 2022 GGE that have been put before us, as well as proposals and concepts that they have discussed. But I expect we will also introduce and discuss new proposals to amend the scope of the UNROCA, promote its participation and use, as well as for ensuring its continuing operation. At the end of this first

session, I am confident that we will have had a wide-ranging discussion. I hope that we can maybe already identify proposals that appear to enjoy the consensus of the group, as well as those that are very important for some experts and less so for others. I expect that some of you will volunteer to work between the first and second session to develop these proposals for consideration at the second session. Thus, at the end of this week, we will have the outline of the report, and hopefully some “homework” for the intersessional period between sessions 1 and 2.

11. For the second session in Geneva in February 2025, I expect that we will spend a lot of time discussing proposals that could become recommendations. We will also have an opportunity to discuss first drafts of the report that are more factual in nature – for example the presentation of the conclusions and recommendations of previous GGE, the level of participation in the Register and factors influencing this, as well as access to and use of the Register. By the end of this session, we will have text in front of us for the several parts of the report, but we will not have our conclusions and recommendations finalized. I expect that we will have well-developed proposals for the continuing operation of UNROCA and its further development. We will be able to use the proposals for consultations in our respective capitals in preparation for the third and final session.

12. The third and final session will take place in New York in May 2025. At

this session, we will agree on our conclusions and recommendations for the report. It is in this session that we will finalize and adopt the report. The report's recommendations will be presented to next year's General Assembly for adoption.

13. Second, I would like to draw your attention to the document entitled "Methods of Work" that was also previously circulated by the Secretariat last month via email. I wish to go through a few elements contained in this document that are of particular importance.

**(i) Decision-making**

14. Regarding decision-making, the document notes that, in line with past practice, this Group will operate by consensus.

**(ii) Participation of external experts, guest speakers and others**

15. The document states that, with the agreement of the Group representatives of civil society, regional organizations or arrangements, and independent experts – such as from academic institutions – may be invited to present their views on issues pertaining to topics under consideration by the Group. As the Group will work in closed meetings, presentations by representatives of civil society or independent experts would be made in informal sessions. Subsequently, those representatives and independent experts would be asked to leave the room prior to the resumption of the formal meeting,

in closed mode.

16. May I take it that the Group wishes to proceed accordingly?

It is so decided. [ ► GAVEL ]

17. Taking into account the programme of work, I wish to propose the following experts engage in specific sessions throughout this week:

- *Mr. PAUL HOLTOM*, Head of the Conventional Arms and Ammunition Programme, UNIDIR, in his role as technical consultant on proposals for amending the Register's scope discussed by previous GGEs this afternoon, and on participation levels and measures to promote participation later in the week. We can also ask Paul to prepare presentations and materials to support our deliberations in future sessions too.
- *Mr. MATTHEW GEORGE*, Director of the Arms Transfers Programme, SIPRI, on trends in arms transfers and military expenditure also this afternoon.
- *Ms. SARAH GRAND-CLÉMENT*, Researcher, UNIDIR, on the scope of UNROCA, including on uncrewed maritime systems on Tuesday morning.
- *Mr. JAMES BEVAN*, Executive Director, Conflict Armament

Research, on the scope of UNROCA, including on ammunition on Tuesday afternoon.

- *Ms. CARINA SOLMINARO*, Head of the Arms Trade Treaty Secretariat on reporting practices and challenges on Wednesday morning.
- *Mr. AHOBA JOSEPH*, Director of Small Arms Division / *Mr. ABAYOMI ADEOMI*, Programme Officer on Small Arms and Light Weapons, ECOWAS, *Ms. JANAINA HOMERIN*, Specialist at the Program of Assistance for Control of Arms and Munition, OAS and *Mr. KRISTIJAN PODBEVSEK*, Political-Military Officer, OSCE on their respective regional instruments and linkages with UNROCA on Thursday afternoon.
- *Ms. RACHEL STOHL*, Senior Vice President of Research Programs and Director of the Conventional Defense Program, Stimson Center on the utilization of UNROCA data for policy and research on Thursday afternoon.

18. With many thanks to Secretariat for making arrangements for these presentations, I will invite these individuals to participate in the respective meeting of the Group and to present their views. Very specific areas of expertise have been identified to support focused discussions. I believe their contributions

will greatly enhance our deliberations and help inform our conclusions.

19. I see there are no objections. It is so decided. [ ► GAVEL ]

**Agenda item 6: Presentations of the Secretariat**

20. In light of the short amount of time available to us and the extensive preparatory work undertaken for this Group, I propose that we dispense with any general debate and move directly to the consideration of focused matters of substance, guided by the programme of work.

21. For every meeting, the Secretariat will keep a rolling list of speakers. I would encourage each of you to take full advantage of this informal setting to engage in interactive discussion. At this point, I would like to introduce Ms. Claudia Garcia Guiza of UNODA who will serve as Secretary of our Group.

22. Now that we have concluded the procedural matters for this morning, and as reflected in our programme of work, I would now like to invite the secretariat to share their presentations. Now I will give the floor to Ms. Claudia Garcia Guiz, Political Affairs Officer at UNDA, for a presentation on the implementation on the recommendations to the Secretariat.

[Claudia begins her presentations]

Thank you, Claudia, for your presentation. Do we have any questions for Claudia?

23. Now I will give the floor to Mr. Randall Tilson, Research Assistant at



UNODA, for a presentation on the UNROCA reporting tool.

[Randall begins his presentations]

Thank you, Randall, for your presentation. Are there any queries for Randall?

24. Now I will give the floor to Ms. Leonie Hopgood, Associate Political Affairs Officer UNODA, for a presentation on the UNROCA database.

[Leonie begins her presentations]

Thank you, Leonie, for your presentation. Do any experts have a question for Leonie?

25. And lastly, I will give the floor to Mr. Rene Holbach, Political Affairs Officer at UNODA, for a presentation on the UNROCA data strategy.

[Rene begins his presentations]

Thank you, Rene, for your presentation. As before, any questions from the group?

26. And thank you again to the colleagues from the secretariat for sharing their presentations.

### **Action item 7: Administrative and other matters**

27. Before we finish our first am session, I want to inform you of a few administrative and other matters.

28. For our morning and afternoon session, I would kindly ask you to be in

the conference room a few minutes before the session starts, as we will start every session on time. This is particularly important for sessions in which we will hear a presentation from our expert panellists, because those presentations have to start at 10.00 am or 3.00 pm sharp.

29. In your break, you can enjoy lunch at the UN cafeteria on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor and take a coffee break in one of the several cafes in the UN secretariat building. Feel free to ask one of our UNODA colleagues for directions. If you wish to leave the building and go for lunch to a nearby restaurant, the colleagues will also happily guide you to convenient places in the neighbourhood.

30. With this, I would like to end this morning session. We will reconvene at 3:00 pm.

31. For those experts whose travel was sponsored, please remember to keep your boarding pass in order to process your reimbursement. Once you return to your country of residence, you have to submit a copy of your boarding pass via email within 10 business days to our colleague Randall from the Secretariat.

This meeting stands adjourned.

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