



Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime

Distr.: General
24 April 2024

Original: English

Report on the meeting of the Working Group on Firearms held in Vienna on 3 and 4 April 2024

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 5/4, entitled “Illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition”, the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime decided to establish an open-ended intergovernmental working group on firearms, in accordance with article 32, paragraph 3, of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and rule 2, paragraph 2, of the rules of procedure for the Conference, to be chaired by a member of the Bureau of the Conference, to advise and assist the Conference in the implementation of its mandate with regard to the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

2. In that resolution, the Conference also decided that the working group should perform the following functions: (a) facilitate implementation of the Firearms Protocol through the exchange of experience and practices among experts and practitioners; (b) make recommendations to the Conference on how States parties could better implement the provisions of the Firearms Protocol; (c) assist the Conference in providing guidance to its secretariat on the activities of the secretariat and on the development of technical assistance tools relating to the implementation of the Firearms Protocol; and (d) make recommendations to the Conference on how the working group could better coordinate with the various international bodies combating the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition, in the area of supporting and promoting implementation of the Firearms Protocol.

3. In its resolution 7/1, entitled “Strengthening the implementation of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols thereto”, the Conference decided that the Working Group on Firearms would be a constant element of the Conference, forwarding its reports and recommendations to the Conference, and encouraged the Working Group to consider meeting on an annual basis, as needed.

4. Lastly, in its resolution 11/6, entitled “Strengthening international cooperation to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition”, the Conference underscored the importance of the Working Group as a substantive and useful network of experts and competent authorities established to identify, address and propose responses to new challenges and trends, improve international cooperation and exchange



information and best practices related to preventing and combating illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition, and took note with appreciation of its work and of the recommendations resulting therefrom. The Conference further invited States parties to consider, as appropriate, applying the relevant and applicable recommendations and discussion points resulting from the Working Group meetings, in order to contribute to the strengthening of international cooperation against the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition.

II. Recommendations

5. At its meeting held in Vienna on 3 and 4 April 2024, the Working Group on Firearms adopted the recommendations presented below for consideration by the Conference of the Parties. Bearing in mind the voluntary nature of the recommendations, States may implement them where appropriate, feasible and consistent with domestic law.

A. Recommendations on operationalizing the Firearms Protocol in view of technological developments relating to the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition

Recommendation 1

In the light of the use of emerging technologies, such as 3D printing, in the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition, States are encouraged to review their laws and regulations, including, where appropriate and if they deem it necessary, through criminalization provisions, to address readily convertible weapons and any kind of illicitly manufactured polymer firearms and modular weapons and their parts and components, as well as the illicit reactivation of deactivated firearms and other emerging aspects, in order to ensure that these illegal acts are appropriately criminalized in a manner consistent with the Firearms Protocol.

Recommendation 2

With a view to preventing the illicit reactivation of deactivated firearms, States are encouraged to consider adopting national deactivation standards in a manner consistent with the Firearms Protocol to ensure that deactivated firearms are permanently inoperable.

Recommendation 3

With a view to filling legislative gaps with regard to 3D-printed weapons, States may wish to consider regulating the blueprints required for the 3D printing of firearms and their parts and components, and establishing as a criminal offence the illicit possession, uploading, downloading and transfer of such blueprints for the purpose of illicit manufacturing and criminal use of or trafficking in firearms.

Recommendation 4

To improve transfer controls over firearms, their parts and components and ammunition in the implementation of the Firearms Protocol, States parties are encouraged to establish appropriate export, import and transit control systems.

Recommendation 5

To ensure the traceability of firearms and prevent their illicit manufacturing and trafficking, in line with article 8 of the Firearms Protocol, parties should require the unique marking of firearms. In addition, without prejudice to article 8 of the Protocol,

States are encouraged to ensure that all essential parts and components are subject to regulatory regimes under their domestic law and, where appropriate and feasible, are marked in an identifiable manner, in order to enhance the traceability of essential firearm parts and components and prevent their illicit manufacturing or combination, whether they are 3D-printed or factory-made.

Recommendation 6

With a view to preventing and combating trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition through e-commerce platforms, and postal and courier services, consistent with domestic law and structures, States are encouraged, within their means, to adopt adequate regulations for preventing the illicit sale of weapons online, including by enforcing identity checks, background verification and transaction tracking; to establish specialized units that combine risk assessment, intelligence and investigative functions; to establish communication channels between countries of origin, transit and destination and with relevant service providers in order to raise awareness and enhance detection capacities by exchanging information, including on known trafficking routes, conducting needs assessments and identifying training and detection equipment needs; and to carry out controlled deliveries or joint investigations.

Recommendation 7

States are encouraged to explore the use of technology to enhance responses related to technological developments and changing *modi operandi* in the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition, including in the areas of marking, record-keeping, transfer controls and detection capacities, such as the use of artificial intelligence tools for the automated recognition of illicitly trafficked firearm parts in parcels.

Recommendation 8

States may wish to consider, where appropriate and feasible, increasing capacities for online investigations, including dark web investigations, to prevent and combat cyber-enabled trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition and the illicit distribution of blueprints for the 3D printing of firearms for the purposes of unauthorized manufacturing or trafficking, and to increase the resources of relevant units to that end.

Recommendation 9

States may wish to consider developing, as appropriate, national standard operating procedures to strengthen the forensic and ballistic examination of all firearms-related pieces of evidence and to share information on new *modi operandi* and on the criminal use of new technologies through relevant channels, including through International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) purple notices.

Recommendation 10

States are encouraged, where necessary, to exchange relevant information and intelligence with each other, in accordance with their domestic law, at the global, regional and subregional levels, including with, upon request, the support of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and INTERPOL, as appropriate and within their mandates, on emerging threats related to the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition, with a view to detecting, identifying and disrupting those threats at an early stage.

Recommendation 11

States, UNODC, other relevant organizations, such as INTERPOL, and stakeholders are encouraged, as appropriate and within their respective mandates, to conduct research and analysis into new and emerging trends and technological developments

related to the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition.

Recommendation 12

Upon request, UNODC, INTERPOL and other relevant international organizations, as appropriate and within their respective mandates, are invited to continue providing specialized, targeted, effective and sustainable support to States, including those in conflict and post-conflict situations, in strengthening the capacities of domestic and supranational criminal justice agencies to detect, investigate, prosecute and adjudicate new and emerging forms of illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition, such as firearms trafficking in postal and express courier parcels, including by providing equipment, as appropriate, and technical assistance and capacity-building related to, but not limited to, X-ray detection, the development of risk assessment criteria and standard operating procedures for the screening of parcels.

Recommendation 13

UNODC should organize expert meetings, subject to the availability of resources, for the purpose of developing voluntary, non-binding technical standards and/or guidelines, as appropriate, on the implementation of the Firearms Protocol, including, but not limited to, the following areas:

- (a) Deactivation standards in line with article 9 of the Firearms Protocol;
- (b) Standards for secure methods of destruction, in line with article 6, paragraph 2, of the Firearms Protocol;
- (c) Guidelines that define when a weapon is “readily convertible”;
- (d) Guidelines that define when semi-finished firearm parts and components fall under the regulatory regime for firearms;
- (e) Marking standards, in line with article 8 of the Firearms Protocol, in the light of recent developments in firearms manufacturing, technology and design, in particular in relation to polymer and modular weapons;
- (f) Record-keeping standards, in line with article 7 of the Firearms Protocol, with a specific focus on the designation of essential components for which records should be maintained.

Recommendation 14

UNODC should organize expert meetings, subject to the availability of resources, for the purpose of updating the *Legislative Guide for the Implementation of the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition*, the *Technical Guide to the Implementation of the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition* and the *Model Law against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition*, in the light of emerging threats.

B. Recommendations on the implementation of article 5 (Criminalization) of the Firearms Protocol

Recommendation 15

In recognition of the need for holistic and multidisciplinary responses, States are encouraged, as necessary, to complement the enforcement of the criminal offences set forth in the Firearms Protocol with robust firearms licensing systems, preventive measures and educational and awareness-raising programmes.

Recommendation 16

In addition to incorporating the provisions of article 5 of the Firearms Protocol into national law, parties to the Protocol may wish to consider also applying those provisions to offences related to light weapons and explosives and to consider them as serious offences in line with article 2 of the Organized Crime Convention.

Recommendation 17

Parties to the Firearms Protocol may wish to consider defining all offences under the Protocol as serious crimes, as defined in article 2 of the Organized Crime Convention, and should establish commensurate and proportionate sanctions.

Recommendation 18

States are encouraged to strengthen their national legal frameworks to prevent and prosecute the intentional misuse of firearms permits or licences granted to private security companies.

Recommendation 19

Parties to the Firearms Protocol may wish to consider, subject to fundamental principles of their legal systems, that both acts perpetrated in preparation for the mandatory criminal offences under the Protocol and acts carried out in an unsuccessful attempt to commit such offences are punishable.

Recommendation 20

States are encouraged to establish criminal liability for organizing, directing, aiding, abetting, facilitating or counselling the commission of offences under the Firearms Protocol, including with a view to dismantling and tackling organized criminal groups, and to hold the leaders of such groups accountable.

Recommendation 21

States are encouraged to consider making appropriate use of the special investigative techniques set forth in the Organized Crime Convention, such as controlled deliveries and undercover operations, establishing joint investigative bodies and making use of new technologies based on artificial intelligence solutions, with appropriate safeguards, in order to increase the effectiveness of criminal investigations of illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition.

C. Recommendations on matters pertaining to the review of the implementation of the Firearms Protocol

Recommendation 22

Parties to the Convention should redouble their efforts to engage in the Mechanism for the Review of the Implementation of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime in a timely manner, including by nominating focal points promptly and ensuring their responsiveness throughout the process. The Working Group on Firearms further recommends that the Conference of the Parties consider modalities, as proposed by the secretariat, for the participation of new States parties in the Mechanism.

III. Summary of deliberations

6. The following summary of deliberations was prepared by the secretariat in close coordination with the Chair. It was not subject to negotiation and adoption during the meeting and was instead prepared as a summary by the Chair.

7. In their general statements, some speakers expressed concern that the proliferation of illicit firearms and ammunition fuelled transnational organized crime, terrorism, conflict and violence; underlined the importance of the Firearms Protocol as a key international instrument to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition; and shared national experiences in its implementation. They welcomed the recent ratification of the Protocol by China and promoted the universalization of the Protocol. In addition, they commended UNODC for its legislative and technical assistance to States and other capacity-building activities to facilitate the implementation of the Protocol. One speaker also encouraged further synergies between relevant international instruments and organizations, the further involvement of civil society, and the integration of a gender perspective into all activities of the Office.

A. Operationalizing the Firearms Protocol in view of technological developments relating to the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition

8. At its 1st and 2nd meetings, on 3 April 2024, the Working Group on Firearms considered agenda item 2, entitled “Operationalizing the Firearms Protocol in view of technological developments relating to the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition”.

9. Before the Chair opened the panel discussion on the agenda item, as proposed by the secretariat in background paper [CTOC/COP/WG.6/2024/2](#), the Working Group agreed to use the revised, streamlined and updated discussion points from its seventh meeting, held in 2020, as one source for the negotiation and adoption of recommendations related to agenda item 2.

10. The ensuing panel discussion was facilitated by Davor Ilic, Expert Adviser for the Prevention of Smuggling, Department for the Prevention of Smuggling and Offences, Directorate for Indirect Taxation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States; Qi Xiguo, Director General of the Ministry of Public Security, and Zeng Lei, Official of the General Administration of Customs of China, on behalf of the Group of Asia-Pacific States; José Romero Morgaz, Team Leader, Firearms, Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs of the European Union, and Denis Jacqmin, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Attaché, Federal Public Service, Foreign Affairs Office of Belgium, on behalf of the Group of Western European and Other States; and Ivaylo Stefanov, Firearms Programme Specialist with INTERPOL.

11. Mr. Ilic delivered a presentation on the trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition through express courier and postal parcels. He provided an overview of the experience of his country with the implementation of the UNODC Project Hermes initiative, which was aimed at preventing and disrupting firearms trafficking flows through express courier and postal services into, within and from the Western Balkans. He noted that the project focused on strengthening the capacities of specialized customs and law enforcement units to identify and detect firearms in express courier and postal parcels, including through X-ray image recognition workshops, on fostering bilateral, regional and international mechanisms to encourage the sharing of good practices in countering firearms trafficking, and on creating permanent channels of communication between designated postal operators, postal service companies and customs authorities. Furthermore, he presented a case study from his country on the detection of a firearm part in a parcel that had led to a complex investigation and the dismantling of a trafficking network that trafficked parts of military automatic weapons to various countries around the world under the guise of a gunsmith workshop for hunting and sporting weapons. The panellist noted that large quantities of firearms, firearm parts and ammunition had been seized. He

concluded by stressing the importance of providing proper training in the X-ray recognition of both firearms and firearm parts, and of establishing thorough risk assessment criteria for screening postal shipments.

12. In the same vein, the first panellist from China, Mr. Zeng, gave an introduction on the efforts and practice in combating firearms trafficking through postal services in China. He explained that, in 2020, a multidivisional joint research workstation had been set up at Shenzhen airport, combining risk analysis, intelligence and field operations, including controlled deliveries, in order to target and intercept illegal shipments and the networks involved in them. He further explained the workflow for processing postal parcels to detect illicit consignments: in the first screening, the data of all processed parcels were compared against risk indicators, eliminating suspicion regarding some 98 per cent of parcels, while in the second screening, suspicious parcels (i.e. the remaining 2 per cent) were processed by an artificial intelligence recognition system in order to detect potentially illicit items. Only parcels that were flagged by the system were then physically inspected. The second Chinese panellist, Mr. Qi, addressed the use of 3D printing technology for the illicit manufacturing of firearms, providing an overview of recent technological developments in that area. According to the panellist, the 3D printing of firearms and firearm parts and components had gradually emerged, lowering manufacturing costs and thresholds to obtain and use illicit and untraceable firearms. He called for a multidimensional approach to address the illicit 3D printing of firearms, combining reinforced legal frameworks, awareness-raising, strict enforcement, and international cooperation and information exchange.

13. Mr. Romero Morgaz began his intervention by outlining firearms-related threats in the European Union based on the latest edition of the *European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment*, published by the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation in 2021. Both terrorist and criminal groups procured illicit firearms through similar sources, including as a result of the diversion of firearms from legal supplies or from weapon stocks from past or ongoing conflicts, the reactivation of deactivated firearms, the conversion of non-lethal weapons into live-firing lethal firearms, and the illicit manufacture of firearms in clandestine workshops, including with the use of 3D printing technology or assembly from semi-finished essential components. He then provided an overview of the policy, legislative and institutional framework in the European Union to address those threats, including its action plan on firearms trafficking for the period 2020–2025, which was aimed at safeguarding the legal market for firearms and avoiding diversion, and the European Multidisciplinary Platform against Criminal Threats (EMPACT), with its priority action on firearms. The panellist also underlined that the experiences of the European Union in addressing technological developments in relation to the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition could be beneficial for developing international technical standards on the implementation of the Firearms Protocol.

14. Mr. Jacqmin focused his presentation on the impact of new technologies in firearms manufacturing and design on the marking requirements established by the Firearms Protocol; the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects; and the International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons. He explained that firearms designs had evolved from mainly steel-made firearms up until the 1980s to firearms with polymer frames and components thereafter, which had resulted in challenges for manufacturers in relation to applying durable and recoverable markings on them. Moreover, according to the panellist, since 2005, various models of firearms had been designed and manufactured using a modular approach, allowing them to be fitted with different components, but resulting in the risk of different serial numbers appearing on different parts of the same weapon, which could lead to misidentification. He then elaborated on different marking technologies for polymer firearms, namely the insertion of markable metal inserts in the frame and the “window to frame” marking approach

(windows in the polymer frame that make it possible to read markings on metallic parts situated under the polymer), and different approaches for ensuring the unique marking of essential parts of modular weapons. Finally, the panellist provided an overview of the parallel discussions in the context of the Programme of Action on Small Arms with regard to establishing an open-ended technical expert group to develop recommendations to ensure the full implementation of the International Tracing Instrument and the Programme of Action in the light of recent developments in small arms and light weapons manufacturing, technology and design.

15. Lastly, Mr. Stefanov provided the Working Group with insights on the impact of technological developments on the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, highlighting that technological developments during the past decade had allowed private individuals, criminals and paramilitary groups to improve the sophistication, quality and reliability of privately manufactured firearms. He put specific emphasis on semi-finished unmarked components, in particular 80 per cent receivers, the conversion of airsoft, gas and acoustic expansion weapons into lethal firearms in Europe and beyond, and the use of fast parcel and postal companies to traffic firearms. In relation to the use of 3D printing and CNC milling technology for the illicit manufacturing of firearms and firearm accessories, he noted that some countries had recently reported an increase of 300 to 900 per cent in the number of seizures involving 3D-printed weapons; often, those cases were linked to far-right extremists. Instructions on how to manufacture complete firearms without conventionally manufactured parts were widely available and the reliability of those arms had significantly increased.

16. After the panel discussion, several speakers addressed questions to the panellists, including on the use of artificial intelligence solutions for the detection of illicitly trafficked firearms, new marking technologies and the regulation and marking of essential firearm components that were difficult to manufacture with 3D printing technology. The panellists explained that, in particular, the barrel of a firearm, which could not be 3D-printed, could be replaced with certain pipes that could be purchased in any hardware store, but that it would be useful to consider the development of international marking standards and standards that defined when weapons were considered to be “convertible” in order to unify different approaches and ensure the traceability of firearms and their essential components to the highest extent possible.

17. Following the discussion with the panellists, the Chair, having taken note of the panellists’ recommendations, invited the meeting participants to share further observations or provide ideas for additional recommendations. During the subsequent discussion, several speakers expressed concern about the global threat and increasing availability of 3D-printed firearms as potential lethal weapons and the need for relevant and concrete steps to address the challenge posed by them. Some speakers elaborated on updates to their legislation in response to emerging trends, such as 3D printing, the conversion of blank-firing guns, the use of postal and courier services and the purchase of firearms and firearms parts online, including through dark web marketplaces. Specific emphasis was placed on promising approaches, such as national standards, to ensure that gas and alarm pistols, which did not fall under the regulatory regime for firearms, could not be converted. It was also mentioned that, in some jurisdictions, although those standards were in place, readily convertible weapons continued to remain in circulation. One speaker pointed out that technical assistance was essential for strengthening the technical and operational capacities of national authorities involved in preventing and combating firearms-related crime. Another speaker identified increased international cooperation, mutual legal assistance and information exchange as essential to combating the threat of illicit firearms trafficking and organized crime in the light of technological developments.

18. Several speakers indicated their countries’ support for the development of technical standards on the implementation of the Firearms Protocol, as well as the updating of the *Legislative Guide for the Implementation of the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition* and the *Model Law against the Illicit Manufacturing of and*

Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition. Another speaker provided an overview of the discussions in the framework of the Programme of Action on Small Arms on establishing the above-mentioned open-ended technical expert group, which was to be open to all Member States and should be composed of national experts in the fields of marking, tracing, forensics, law enforcement and legal services, and which should provide insights from the industry and the private sector, academia and civil society.

19. One speaker informed the Working Group about the outcomes of a side event held during the lunch break of the Working Group on a multi-agency approach to tackling the threat of 3D-printed firearms, which focused on the global threat of the spread and increasing availability of 3D-printed firearms as feasible lethal weapons in serious crime.

B. Implementation of article 5 (Criminalization) of the Firearms Protocol

20. At its 2nd meeting, on 3 April 2024, the Working Group considered agenda item 3, entitled “Implementation of article 5 (Criminalization) of the Firearms Protocol”.

21. The discussion was facilitated by He Chunyan, Judge of the Supreme People’s Court of China, and Yu Lianchi, Assistant to the Senior Procurator at the Supreme People’s Procuratorate of China, both on behalf of the Group of Asia-Pacific States; Natasa Godzoska, Senior Prosecutor, Higher Public Prosecutor’s Office of North Macedonia, on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States; Stanko Krstik, Manager, Firearms Policy Directorate, Crime Prevention Branch, Ministry of Public Safety of Canada, on behalf of the Group of Western European and Other States; Hendrik Odendaal, Lieutenant Colonel, Firearms and Explosives Section, of the South Africa Police Service, on behalf of the Group of African States; and León Castellanos-Jankiewicz of Mexico, Senior Researcher in International Law at the Asser Institute, on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

22. Ms. He and Mr. Yu delivered a presentation on criminal justice responses to firearms criminality in China. They explained that national firearms-related criminal offences went beyond the requirements of the Firearms Protocol. The panellists stated that China also applied most of the offences established under the Protocol to light weapons, explosives and other weapons that were not included in the scope of application of the Protocol, such as certain air, gas and alarm weapons, and enacted additional offences such as illicit possession, illicit lending, illicit domestic transfers and the diversion, theft of firearms. They also pointed out that China, while adhering to the principle of proportionality between crime and punishment, penalized firearms and explosives-related offences as serious crimes in accordance with the law, which had led to a significant decrease in the total number of firearms and explosives-related crimes. Furthermore, they mentioned the use of sentencing guidelines that stipulated different criminalization criteria and aggravated circumstances. Lastly, the panellists explained how China cooperated with private sector entities in the investigation of firearms-related crime, including with social media and online shopping platforms, and postal services and the shipping industry.

23. Mr. Krstik started his presentation with an overview of the respective firearms laws in Canada, namely the Canadian Firearms Act and the Canadian Criminal Code. The Firearms Act categorized and regulated firearms to promote public safety and reduce firearms-related crime, while the Criminal Code established offences related to the criminal use and unlawful possession of firearms. The panellist explained the classification of firearms and the licensing regime in place and elaborated on the recently passed new firearms control legislation, which was considered to be among the strongest laws passed in four decades. The bill prevented new assault-style firearms from entering the Canadian market, classified unlawfully manufactured firearms as prohibited, criminalized the possession of computer data for the illegal

manufacture of firearms, required a licence for the purchase and importation of essential firearms parts, prevented most individuals from buying, selling or transferring handguns, and introduced new harm reduction measures to help address risks associated with firearms in situations of gender-based or intimate partner violence or of self-harm. Mr. Krstik described how Canada had implemented the various provisions of the Firearms Protocol into its national legislation. According to the panellist, particular attention had been paid to the regulation of essential parts of firearms to prevent factory-made parts being illicitly assembled from illicitly manufactured parts.

24. Ms. Godzoska informed the Working Group about how North Macedonia, with the support of UNODC, had managed to close legal gaps in the implementation of the criminal offences under the Firearms Protocol. She mentioned that, in 2023, significant legislative changes had been made in North Macedonia to amend and supplement the Criminal Code, as was the case in other Balkan States. As a result, North Macedonia had criminalized different types of illicit trafficking and was the first country in Europe to criminalize the possession of blueprints for the illicit 3D printing of firearms. She also explained the criminalization of aggravated forms of firearms-related offences, namely conduct involving larger quantities of firearms or ammunition or the commission of the offences by a group of people, gang or other criminal association. The panellist noted that North Macedonia had fully harmonized its criminal offences with the Protocol and that significant improvement could also be observed in other Balkan States owing to the support received from UNODC. Looking ahead, she informed the Working Group that the next steps after the amendments to the Criminal Code would include the development of a legal commentary on firearms-related offences to harmonize judicial practice within North Macedonia.

25. Mr. Odendaal described the investigative and prosecutorial approaches in combating the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition in South Africa. He provided a situation analysis on the illicit firearms market in South Africa, with specific emphasis on convertible blank-firing pistols and conversion kits for the illicit manufacturing of firearms, which were a common source of illicit firearms for organized criminal groups. The panellist noted that the import or possession of such blank-firing weapons was not illegal in itself in South Africa, but the conversion of those weapons into live-firing firearms changed their legal status, making their possession illegal. He further explained that criminals often used postal and courier services to traffic firearms, their parts and components and ammunition. The panellist also elaborated on best practices in preventing and combating illicit firearms-related conduct, including training on the correct identification and tracing of firearms and ammunition, workshops and industry involvement, joint investigations, undercover operations and controlled deliveries. Lastly, he noted that international cooperation between law enforcement agencies was essential for the detection and dismantling of groups involved in firearms offences.

26. Mr. Castellanos-Jankiewicz focused his presentation on the diversion and illicit transfers of firearms from private security companies. He expressed concern that in certain regions, such as Latin America, private security guards outnumbered public police officers, and he explained how private security companies could contribute to human rights or other abuses through diversion and a lack of oversight of their arsenals. In the view of the panellist, the Firearms Protocol, in particular its article 11, required States parties to take appropriate measures to ensure the security of firearms, their parts and components and ammunition in the hands of private security companies. He also made reference to the Arms Trade Treaty, requiring arms-exporting States parties to assess the risk of diversion, including with the involvement of non-State actors and private security companies. In concluding, the panellist mentioned the possibility of criminalizing both transnational and domestic firearms trafficking conducted by private actors with a focus on private security companies.

27. Following the discussion with the panellists, the Chair, taking note of the panellists' recommendations, invited the meeting participants to share further observations or provide ideas for additional recommendations. Several speakers agreed that it was crucial to fully implement article 5 of the Firearms Protocol in order to combat and eradicate the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition, as well as tampering with firearm markings, and shared examples of national implementation. In addition, they drew attention to further provisions in their respective national legislation, in particular in relation to the licensing regime, artisanal production and brokering. Some speakers expressed support for extending the scope of national offences related to the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms to include light weapons and explosives and to consider also applying those offences in cases of non-intentional conduct.

28. Furthermore, several speakers emphasized that cooperation and information exchange between countries, international organizations and the private sector was crucial, and stressed the importance of dedicated expert-level meetings and platforms in that regard. It was also highlighted that firearms were a tool of power to enable drug trafficking, terrorism and other forms of organized crime and that addressing those crimes required taking illicit firearms out of circulation. In particular, one speaker referred to a transnational joint operation that had led to the dismantling of an organized criminal group and the disruption of illicit arms flows. The operation revealed that firearms, including weapons of war, were being used as payment for deliveries of drugs in a triangular deal involving countries from Latin America, Europe and Asia, which demonstrated the highly interconnected nature of various forms of organized crime. Another speaker shared regional experiences in relation to assessing the implementation of the criminal offences established under the Firearms Protocol in national law, which might lead to the introduction of additional minimum standards for the criminalization of firearms-related offences to ensure a certain degree of harmonization.

29. Moreover, several speakers emphasized the need for technical assistance to strengthen investigations and improve judicial capacities in the fight against firearms trafficking and organized crime, and requested that UNODC continue providing assistance in that regard.

C. Matters pertaining to the review of the implementation of the Firearms Protocol

30. At its 2nd meeting, on 3 April 2024, the Working Group also considered agenda item 4, entitled "Matters pertaining to the review of the implementation of the Firearms Protocol".

31. Given that no list of observations resulting from country reviews had yet been compiled, the Working Group could not consider substantive issues arising from the review of the implementation of provisions of the Firearms Protocol. Instead, representatives of the secretariat delivered a presentation on the latest status of the review process, providing up-to-date information and an overview of the main challenges and needs for technical assistance identified in the first years of the review process.

32. The representatives of the secretariat presented the current progress of the Implementation Review Mechanism, highlighting that only 38 per cent (73 out of 189) country reviews were active and advancing at the time of the meeting. The overall progress made with regard to the Firearms Protocol further revealed inactivity in 60 per cent of the reviews. The representatives of the secretariat presented some of the challenges identified so far, which had an impact on the progress of the Mechanism. Those included delays in the nomination of focal points, the unresponsiveness of some of the nominated officials, and the predominantly virtual nature of the process, which created several identified hindrances, including a lack of in-person exchange among country officials. The representatives of the secretariat

also shared preliminary findings related to the needs for technical or technological assistance identified by some States parties in their self-assessment questionnaires, in relation to the implementation of the Protocol. Moreover, the representatives gave presentations on the financial situation of the Mechanism, highlighting the need for predictable and stable funding to sustain its continued functioning. Finally, a needs assessment survey related to States parties' participation in the Mechanism was circulated among the participants.

33. Following the presentation by the secretariat, one speaker referred to the establishment of an interministerial coordination mechanism to enable efficient engagement in the review process, and encouraged other States parties to consider pursuing similar efforts. Another speaker noted the important role played by the Mechanism in identifying and responding to technical assistance needs and in fostering international cooperation against transnational organized crime. The speaker further acknowledged the challenges faced by States parties throughout the process. Both speakers reaffirmed their countries' commitment to engaging in the review process in a timely manner.

34. The Chair mentioned that, in accordance with paragraph 53 of the procedures and rules for the functioning of the Mechanism, following the conclusion of the eleventh meeting of the Working Group, the third constructive dialogue with relevant stakeholders on the review process related to the Firearms Protocol would be held on 5 April 2024. The Chair further highlighted that, with the support of the secretariat, he would prepare a written summary of the discussion that would be made available to the Working Group at its next meeting.

D. Other matters

35. At its 3rd meeting, on 4 April 2024, the Working Group considered agenda item 5, entitled "Other matters".

36. Pursuant to paragraph 35 (a) of resolution 9/2 of the Conference of the Parties, a representative of the secretariat delivered a presentation on the activities carried out by UNODC since the preceding session of the Working Group to promote the ratification and implementation of the Firearms Protocol.

37. During the discussion that followed, several speakers expressed gratitude for the support provided by the UNODC Firearms Trafficking Section in implementing the Firearms Protocol and discussed potential priorities for the upcoming work of the Section. One speaker emphasized the collaboration between the Section and other relevant international partners, including INTERPOL and the EMPACT priority action on firearms. In addition, several speakers drew attention to the importance of ensuring sufficient funding and staffing to enable the Section to carry out its work, and proposed the allocation of additional funds to the Section.

IV. Organization of the meeting

A. Opening of the meeting

38. The eleventh meeting of the Working Group on Firearms was held in Vienna on 3 and 4 April 2024 and comprised a total of four meetings.

39. The meeting was opened by José Antonio Zabalgaitia Trejo (Mexico), Chair of the Working Group.

40. General statements at the opening of the meeting were made by the representatives of the European Union and China, and by the observer for the United States of America.

41. In accordance with rule 46 of the rules of procedure for the Conference of the Parties, the Chair accorded the right of reply to the observer for the Russian Federation.

B. Statements

42. Representatives of the secretariat provided introductory remarks under agenda items 1, 2, 3 and 4.

43. With the Chair presiding, the discussion under agenda item 2 was led by the following panellists: Davor Ilic (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Qi Xiguo and Zeng Lei (China), José Romero Morgaz (European Commission), Denis Jacqmin (Belgium) and Ivaylo Stefanov (INTERPOL).

44. Under agenda item 2, statements were made by representatives of the following States parties to the Firearms Protocol: Angola, Ecuador, Sweden and Türkiye. Statements under the item were also made by the observer for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, a signatory State to the Protocol, and by the observer for the Islamic Republic of Iran. The observers for the Office for Disarmament Affairs and INTERPOL also made statements under the item.

45. The discussion under agenda item 3 was led by the following panellists: He Chunyan and Yu Lianchi (China), Natasa Godzoska (North Macedonia), Stanko Krstik (Canada), Hendrik Odendaal (South Africa) and León Castellanos-Jankiewicz (Mexico).

46. Under agenda item 3, statements were made by representatives of the following parties to the Firearms Protocol: Armenia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, European Union, Italy, Mexico, Netherlands (Kingdom of the) and South Africa. A statement under the item was also made by the observer for EMPACT.

47. Under agenda item 4, statements were made by representatives of the following parties to the Firearms Protocol: Ecuador and France.

48. Under agenda item 5, statements were made by representatives of the following parties to the Firearms Protocol: Costa Rica, El Salvador, European Union, Mexico and Sudan. Statements were also made by the observer for Australia, a signatory State to the Protocol, and by the observers for Colombia, the United States and EMPACT.

C. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work

49. At its 1st meeting, on 3 April 2024, the Working Group adopted by consensus the following agenda:

1. Organizational matters:
 - (a) Opening of the meeting;
 - (b) Adoption of the agenda and organization of work.
2. Operationalizing the Firearms Protocol in view of technological developments relating to the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition.
3. Implementation of article 5 (Criminalization) of the Firearms Protocol.
4. Matters pertaining to the review of the implementation of the Firearms Protocol.
5. Other matters.
6. Adoption of the report.

D. Attendance

50. The following States parties to the Firearms Protocol were represented at the meeting: Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Estonia, European Union, France, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, Honduras, India, Italy, Kenya, Lebanon, Libya, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, Morocco, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Nicaragua, North Macedonia, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Tunisia, Türkiye, Ukraine, United Republic of Tanzania and Uruguay.

51. The following States signatories to the Firearms Protocol were represented by observers: Australia, Canada and United Kingdom.

52. The following States that are not parties or signatories to the Firearms Protocol were represented by observers: Colombia, Equatorial Guinea, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Malaysia, Malta, Myanmar, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Sri Lanka, Thailand, United Arab Emirates and United States.

53. The following observer State to the United Nations that is not a party or signatory to the Firearms Protocol was represented by observers: State of Palestine.

54. The following intergovernmental organizations and United Nations entities were represented by observers: Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, EMPACT, INTERPOL, League of Arab States, Office for Disarmament Affairs, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, UNODC and Wassenaar Arrangement on Export Controls for Conventional Arms and Dual-Use Goods and Technologies.

55. A list of participants is contained in document [CTOC/COP/WG.6/2024/INF/1/Rev.1](#).

E. Documentation

56. The Working Group had before it the following:

- (a) Annotated provisional agenda ([CTOC/COP/WG.6/2024/1](#));
- (b) Background paper prepared by the Secretariat on operationalizing the Firearms Protocol in view of technological developments relating to the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition ([CTOC/COP/WG.6/2024/2](#));
- (c) Background paper prepared by the Secretariat on the implementation of article 5 (Criminalization) of the Firearms Protocol ([CTOC/COP/WG.6/2024/3](#));
- (d) Background paper prepared by the Secretariat on the status of the functioning of the Mechanism for the Review of the Implementation of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols thereto ([CTOC/COP/WG.6/2024/4](#)).

V. Adoption of the report

57. At its 4th meeting, on 4 April 2024, the Working Group adopted sections I, II, IV and V of the present report.
