Application of Global Voluntary Standards and Guidelines to Strengthen Weapon and Ammunition Management (WAM) in Conflict-affected Settings

Expert meeting organized by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD)

MEETING SUMMARY

About the Organizers

UNIDIR

The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR)—an autonomous institute within the United Nations—conducts research on disarmament and security. UNIDIR is based in Geneva, Switzerland, the centre for bilateral and multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation negotiations, and home of the Conference on Disarmament. The Institute explores current issues pertaining to the variety of existing and future armaments, as well as global diplomacy and local tensions and conflicts. Working with researchers, diplomats, government officials, NGOs and other institutions since 1980, UNIDIR acts as a bridge between the research community and governments. UNIDIR's activities are funded by contributions from governments and donor foundations.

GICHD

The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) is an expert organisation working to reduce the impact of mines, cluster munitions and other explosive hazards, in close partnership with mine action organisations and other human security actors. The GICHD employs 55 staff from 15 countries with unique expertise and knowledge, and is supported by contributions from 20 governments and organisations. Toward attainment of the minimum standard of conduct as per International Ammunition Technical Guidelines (IATG RRPL-1), the GICHD provides training and advisory services to at-risk countries in the ammunition safety management. In collaboration with its partners, the GICHD assists in developing national regulations, methods and tools to achieve good practice in ammunition stockpile and ERW management, thereby enhancing safety and security of ammunition through reduced probability and impact of explosions in storage areas, and diversion from stocks.

Note

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1.   Introduction

1.1. Background

The illicit proliferation, excessive accumulation and misuse of arms and ammunition pose a persistent problem for peace and security at the global, regional and national levels. States in conflict-affected settings in particular are often disproportionately burdened by the illicit flow and availability of arms and ammunition, which impede efforts to provide security to their populations and create an environment conducive to sustainable development.

The impact of the illicit proliferation of arms and ammunition on States, societies, and communities cannot be underestimated. In his recent report on the illicit trade in small arms, the United Nations Secretary-General noted that one in four people on the planet—more than 1.5 billion—live in fragile and conflict-affected settings or in countries with high levels of criminal violence. Furthermore, the Secretary-General's report explains that more than half a million people per year die a violent death[1] and approximately 55,000 die as a direct consequence of armed conflict.[2] Insecure and unsafe management of arms and ammunition is a major contributing factor to the escalation of conflicts and violent incidents. Recognizing these challenges, the United Nations Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters in 2015 recommended that the international community seek greater clarity on, and knowledge of, the role of arms control in managing conflicts.[3]

Current discussions within international and regional arms control forums indicate a growing understanding among policy-makers and practitioners that a more comprehensive approach is needed to address the threat posed by the illicit proliferation of arms and ammunition. In an effort to promote a comprehensive approach to weapon and ammunition management (WAM), the international community has attached greater importance to voluntary standards and guidelines—namely the International Small Arms Control Standards (ISACS)[4] and International Ammunition Technical Guidelines (IATGs)[5]—as crucial sets of tools for strengthening national capacity to manage arms and ammunition and facilitating dialogue between national authorities and assistance providers in defining common objectives and targets for capacity building. Such standards and guidelines, while voluntary, can serve as appropriate instruments to assess the strengths and shortcomings of WAM at the national level.

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[1]   See: General Assembly, *The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects: Report of the Secretary-General,* UN document A/CONF.192/BMS/2016/1, 27 May 2016, https://unoda-web.s3-accelerate.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/2016-05-25-The-illicit-trade-in-small-arms-and-light-weapons-in-all-its-aspects-unedited-advance-copy.pdf.

[2]   See: Security Council, *Small arms and light weapons,* UN document S/2015/289A, 27 April 2015, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2015/289&referer=/english/&Lang=E.

[3]   See: General Assembly, *Work of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters: Report of the Secretary-General,* UN document A/70/186, 24 July 2015, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=a/70/186.

[4]   For more information, see: http://www.smallarmsstandards.org/

[5]   For more information, see: https://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/ammunition/iatg/./

The global use of the ISACS and IATGs—while varying in the degree of use—has grown incrementally since their respective releases. The application of such global standards and guidelines, however, is not without challenges, particularly in conflict-affected settings. As the focus shifts from their roll out to their implementation, there is a need to take stock of how these standards and guidelines have been used by various actors in order to reflect on and consolidate lessons learned and to identify methods and avenues by which their application could better support arms control efforts in conflict-affected settings.

1.2. About this project

In 2015, UNIDIR initiated a project—**International Small Arms and Ammunition Guidance Platform (ISAP)**[6]—designed to serve as a platform for conducting policy-relevant research, facilitating expert dialogue and creating practical tools, in order to improve programming and practices over the full lifecycle management of arms and ammunition in conflict-affected settings (Phase I). The project has three pillars of work:

- Designing and developing a national roadmap to establish a sustainable national framework governing arms and ammunition;
- Examining the role of the United Nations in supporting States to strengthen WAM institutions and to identify possible areas of enhancement; and
- Exploring the application of existing standards and guidelines in conflict-affected settings in order to better understand their use, to address any potential gaps and to explore possible improvements in the guidance provided.

1.3. About this report

This report provides a summary of the discussions which took place during a one-day technical expert meeting organized by UNIDIR and GICHD entitled, "Application of Global Voluntary Standards and Guidelines to Strengthen Weapon and Ammunition Management (WAM) in Conflict-affected Settings". The meeting took place on 19 September 2016 in Geneva, Switzerland. It was organized as part of UNIDIR's ISAP project Phase II (2016). Experts from States, United Nations agencies and expert NGOs attended the closed-door event. The meeting was comprised of four substantive sessions:

1) Operationalizing the ISACS and IATGs in conflict-affected settings: mapping their scope of applications, and identifying challenges and opportunities;

2) Review of essential security elements to assess WAM capacity in conflict-affected settings;

3) Review of essential safety elements to assess WAM capacity in conflict-affected settings; and

4) Observations and reflection.

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[6]   The ISAP project series (Phase I–II) is supported by the Governments of Germany and Switzerland.

1.4. Objective of the meeting

The objective of this expert meeting was to initiate a technical dialogue among practitioners and experts on the application of international voluntary guidelines and standards, specifically the ISACS and IATGs, in efforts to strengthen WAM in conflict-affected settings. The expert meeting sought to draw from practitioners' experience and knowledge of the applicability and utility of the ISACS and IATGs in challenging security environments with resource constraints, and to identify possible methods of operationalizing essential safety and security elements from the standards and guidelines. The meeting aimed to help form a better understanding among practitioners of the practical uses of these international voluntary guidelines and to support opportunities for the improvement of existing standards or development of further guidance materials and tools.

This technical meeting follows a UNIDIR informal consultative meeting entitled, "Examining common understanding to establish national frameworks governing the full lifecycle of weapons and ammunition in conflict-affected settings", which took place on 8 June 2016 in the margins of the Sixth Biennial Meeting of States on the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (UN PoA) in New York. The 8 June event represented a policy-level kick-off for UNIDIR's study of the application of international voluntary guidelines and standards in efforts to strengthen WAM in conflict-affected settings.

This technical meeting forms a starting point in a series of expert-led discussions dedicated to examining the role of arms control in conflict-affected settings. UNIDIR envisions the continuation of this expert meeting series in 2017.

1.5. Guiding questions addressed at the meeting

Many institutions, including international expert NGOs, United Nations agencies and States, utilize international voluntary guidelines and standards to varying degrees. Unpacking and understanding this variation, i.e. why it is exists and what causes it, is key to understanding how international actors can better contribute to the effective and appropriate use of such guidelines and standards where needed. This meeting also sought to go beyond unpacking and understanding the varying uses of such guidelines and standards to explore how this variation affects WAM results and outcomes in conflict-affected settings.

In pursuit of this, UNIDIR and GICHD posed three sets of guiding questions to the technical experts:

- Who has used the ISACS and IATGs, and where? How and in what capacity were they applied? What were the end results of their application?
- What are some common challenges in using the ISACS and IATGs in conflict-affected settings? What options and approaches have been considered in light of these challenges?
- How can stakeholders best operationalize the ISACS and IATGs given the challenges and limitations associated with working in conflict-affected settings?

1.6. Definitions

In this paper, the term "conflict-affected settings" refers to settings where States are affected by armed conflict and/or have recently emerged out of a conflict. In both cases, the term operates under the assumption that the State in question has an established formal governance body or has concluded a peace agreement. This assumption is important as UNIDIR regards the existence of a national ownership and governance body as a prerequisite for the establishment of an effective WAM framework.

UNIDIR utilizes the term "WAM" in this paper; it is used interchangeably with the term "arms and ammunition management". The term "WAM" is used to describe the full lifecycle management of arms and ammunition, which includes a wide range of operational areas of arms control (for example, transfer controls, marking, record-keeping, physical security and stockpile management, collection and disposal). It also takes into account the institutional capacities and processes that are involved in implementing WAM.

UNIDIR recognizes the differences in strategic, policy and operational management between arms and ammunition. UNIDIR also recognizes that the ISACS and IATGs were developed under different processes and serve different operational and contextual purposes. This report organizes the ISACS and IATGs together for two reasons:

1) In conflict-affected settings, there is often a lack of regulatory and operational frameworks that effectively divide and differentiate between arms and ammunition management. In many cases, the same national authorities, due to security demands, are tasked with arms and ammunition management. In such contexts, the international partners often respond to both arms and ammunition management needs. As such, the use of the ISACS and IATGs have been bundled together in this report to reflect both perspectives and lessons learned from conflict-affected settings;

2) This component of the ISAP project is to designed to examine the applicability and utility of both the ISACS and IATGs in conflict-affected settings. In this regard, this report reflects findings relevant for both standards and guidelines.

2. Operationalizing the ISACS and IATGs in conflict-affected settings: Mapping their scope of applications, and identifying challenges and opportunities

The first session of the meeting was devoted to examining the current use of the ISACS and IATGs by practitioners in conflict-affected settings. The session focused on the scope of the application of these standards and guidelines, including profile of users, context of their use, methods of their use, and any possible challenges faced in their application.

The session began with the group exploring an introductory context for the application of international voluntary guidelines and standards in WAM activities in conflict-affected settings. Several participants noted that in recent years there had been a growing shared understanding within the international community that States in conflict-affected settings should establish a national framework and a roadmap to comprehensively govern the processes and actors involved in the lifecycle of WAM. The group recognized that within such efforts there are substantial challenges, including but not limited to: a lack of capacity and/or resources at the national level as well as lack of comprehensive guidance to develop national frameworks governing arms and ammunition. In this context, the group acknowledged that, while voluntary, the international guidelines and standards can be useful in supporting States to establish and/or strengthen their national WAM framework.

2.1. Complexity of conflict-affected settings

The group discussed the potential complexity of using the ISACS and IATGs in conflict-affected settings. First, one participant raised the question of how the application of such global standards and guidelines was envisaged when first developed. The participant noted that while applying standards and guidelines may be feasible when operating under clear regulations, effective coordination of national actors, and sufficient amounts of technical and financial resources, such conditions often did not exist in conflict-affected settings. Based on these observations, the group expressed the need to match expectations with achievability and effectiveness when considering the application of standards and guidelines in such settings.

Following this conversation, another participant reflected on the multiplicity of national and international actors often involved in the lifecycle of WAM in conflict-affected settings. The participant explained that actors often use guidelines and standards such as the ISACS and IATGs to varying degrees, but also operate with their own respective sets of national or internal guidelines and control procedures for determining success. The group shared the view that there is an ongoing coordination issue arising from these myriad actors, which contributes to decisions regarding how much or how little to use these guidelines and standards, if at all. One participant cautioned that variation in the type of standards and guidelines used, as well as the degree to which they are applied (or not), may have implications for how States design and develop their national controls.

To begin unpacking this issue and determining possible ways forward to address these challenges, participants were asked by the organizers to share their experience in operationalizing the ISACS and IATGs in conflict-affected settings. Participants explained

that the ISACS and IATGs were used to varying degrees in Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Central African Republic, Sudan, South Sudan, among other States. Some participants explained that they use the ISACS and/or IATGs in tandem with national, regional or other multilateral standards. Many noted that the ISACS and/or IATGs were used in parts—i.e. applied where they were applicable or possible with existing resources. They noted that certain measures in the standards and guidelines were either not applicable or were too high of a requirement given the conflict-affected settings in which these practitioners worked. Therefore, operationalizing certain measures required some tailoring or selection to fit with the needs and capabilities in a given setting.

2.2. Reflections on the applicability of the ISACS and IATGs

Specific to the IATGs, several participants noted that the existence of clear technical guidelines and an incremental level approach (i.e. risk reduction process levels 1–3 in the IATG) were helpful in efforts to operationalize the ammunition guidelines. Most participants also agreed that clarity regarding the technical guidance on operational aspects of ammunition management enabled them to more easily decide whether certain control measures were applicable or achievable in each specific working context. With regard to specific modules, module 1.50 on the United Nations explosive hazard classification system, codes 2.20 on quantity and separation distances, 2.40 on safeguarding of explosive facilities, and 3.10 on inventory management, and series 4, 5, and 6 on explosive facilities, were most frequently referenced by participants during the meeting. The United Nations *SaferGuard* IATG implementation toolkit was also referenced several times by participants, with a focus on the utility of its risk reduction checklist.

As regards challenges to its application, participants noted that technical and financial limitations were clear obstacles to using the IATGs in conflict-affected contexts. When referring to technical limitations, the group acknowledged that such know-how constraints not only existed in national authorities in affected States, but also, in some assistance-providing institutions. For example, one participant noted that not all international staff working in the area of WAM in affected States were qualified ammunition technical personnel. The group shared concerns over the limited availability of international ammunition management experts to provide support in conflict-affected settings.

Specific to the ISACS, several participants noted that these standards were widely used as an entry point for weapons security dialogue with national authorities in conflict-affected settings. Two participants noted that the ISACS were generally less technical in nature than the IATGs, which gave practitioners greater flexibility over how the standards were applied. The same participants explained that the ease of use of the ISACS also enabled a wider user base to understand and apply the standards in their work, whether at the programmatic or operational levels. The group also briefly discussed which terminology to use when referencing the use of the ISACS—i.e. whether or not to view implementation of the ISACS as a *compliance mechanism*. On this point, there was no consensus within the group. Several participants noted that interpretations often depended on the context in which the ISACS were meant to be used. With regard to specific modules, module 5.20 on stockpile management, 5.30 on marking and record-keeping and 5.50 on destruction of weapons were most commonly referenced by the participants during the meeting. This

indicated that most practitioners currently focus their use of the ISACS on the operational series of the standards. The ISACS Assessment Tool was referenced by several participants as being useful in operationalizing the standards.

In terms of the challenges to its application, several participants remarked that the lack of an incremental level approach (akin to the IATG risk reduction process level) made it slightly more challenging for them to determine which ISACS measures to prioritize first. The organizers offered inputs to address this concern, noting that the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) language of "shall", "should", "may" and "can" formed a possible basis of prioritization in the use of the standards. While participants agreed that such categorization was helpful, they nonetheless expressed a desire for a more systematic incremental approach in the standards. One example was raised by a participant: the module 5.60 on border controls was referenced to show that the module did not adequately guide users on which steps should be taken first to strengthen border controls if only limited resources are available before implementation of more advanced measures, such as single window processing. Lastly, this participant felt that it would be beneficial to obtain further clarity on how to manage, accept and communicate possible risks when a decision has been made by an actor not to consider or implement a measure in the ISACS. Unlike the IATGs, where there are mechanisms for consideration and communication of risk acceptance, this participant noted that the ISACS did not provide clear guidance on what consequences and implications should be considered, accepted and communicated in case certain control measures were not achievable. Following this, several participants noted that the risks associated with weapons management were not as high as those associated with safety risks in ammunition management.

2.3. Various uses for the ISACS and IATGs

Next, participants examined the various ways in which the ISACS and IATGs were used in conflict-affected settings. The organizers asked participants to provide specific examples in order to identify possible avenues for their use in such contexts. The following uses for the ISACS and IATGs were referenced by the participants:

- As a guideline, reference or resource for conducting assessment visits and/or training courses;
- As a way to build confidence and political buy-in with a host State;
- As a way to establish a methodological, step-by-step procedural approach among all actors, national and international, involved in WAM activities in a given setting; and/or
- As a way to establish a common approach among national and international actors, so that they "speak the same language".

One general point on which many experts agreed was that international voluntary guidelines and standards such as the ISACS and IATGs were aspirational. It would be a substantial and potentially unrealistic undertaking to attempt to implement the ISACS or IATGs in their entirety in a conflict-affected setting, and therefore many saw these guidelines and standards more as long-term, aspirational goals.

2.4. Common challenges identified

During the final part of this session, participants reflected on some of the more common issues and challenges they had experienced or observed when using international voluntary guidelines and standards in their work. A short summary of the most commonly identified challenges is provided below:

- *Budgetary issues* with implementing the ISACS and IATGs in their entirety, which can result in a need to prioritize and align international efforts with the needs of the host State. Many participants noted that while the host State may express a strong need for a comprehensive infrastructure system and associated procedures in line with international standards and guidelines, the funding available to undertake such an initiative may not exist in national budgets and may not be adequately addressed in the scope of international assistance.

- *Lack of available technical personnel* at the national and international levels to adequately implement measures in the ISACS and IATGs. The group observed that this was particularly relevant for using the IATGs for ammunition management. Participants shared the view that more systematic methods of building the technical capacity of national actors were needed in conflict-affected settings, while there was little agreement on how that could be achieved. Participants also noted that most of the competent international ammunition technical personnel were currently employed or on duty, which posed a challenge to identifying an available expert from an existing pool who would then provide on-the-ground and long-term mentorship and oversight in a host State. One participant noted that even if such international experts were available, their ability to provide long-term support to the host State may often be limited by mandates and time limits on the multilateral operations.

- *High-level buy-in issues* within the host State, which can hinder the long-term sustainability of international and national WAM efforts. The group agreed that operational-level engagement with national actors in the host State on the ISACS and IATGs was generally positive. National experts often welcomed the introduction of relevant international standards and guidelines to strengthen their control systems. Several participants noted, however, that integration of the ISACS and IATG elements at the operational level did not always translate into acceptance and adoption of these measures at the higher level of governance, where WAM was either not considered a high national priority or those working on these issues could not influence national strategy or policy related to WAM. In this regard, participants expressed the need for sensitization through a multilevel approach to government.

- *Institutional and organizational issues* within host State authorities, which can inhibit the long-term sustainability of international efforts. Participants noted the frequent rotation and relocation of knowledgeable or specialized staff could, at times, result in a loss of technical and institutional knowledge. Several participants also reflected on the frequent lack of regulatory frameworks in affected States,

which poses a direct challenge to effectively implementing structural recommendations from the ISACS and IATGs, such as the need to establish a competent national authority to conduct internal inspections and verification of stocks against records of national holdings. One participant noted the possible utility of having further guidance from the international guidelines and standards on how States in conflict-affected settings could design and establish their national management authority on arms and ammunition.

- *Standardization issues* among international actors conducting, for example, physical security and stockpile management (PSSM) training courses using international voluntary guidelines and standards, which can result in varying levels of comprehensiveness. Several examples were raised by participants in this regard. Some participants recognized that significant variation in content, methods of delivery and national and international actors involved in existing training programmes on PSSM posed a clear challenge to building national WAM capacity in a coordinated manner. Similar concerns were expressed with regard to PSSM assessment visits by international actors, where different actors may use different assessment criteria to evaluate risks and identify intervention priorities in an affected State, which may result in vastly inconsistent conclusions on assistance needs by various assessment teams. That said, some other participants felt that standardizing training and assessment methodology across international actors was simply not feasible, and to some degree, not desirable as it may slow down the ongoing efforts to strengthen WAM in conflict-affected settings. The group did not speculate on who could undertake such a harmonization effort.

- *Complementarity issues* between the use of international voluntary guidelines and standards and regional agreements, such as the Organization for American States' *Inter-American Convention Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials,* the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's handbook of best practices, the *Nairobi Protocol for the Prevention, Control and Reduction of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa*, and the ECOWAS *Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Materials*. The organizers noted that the ISACS and IATGs have been drafted to complement and not contradict regional standards and instruments. Participants recognized this effort but noted that they could benefit from greater clarity on the synergies and complementary control measures between the international standards and guidelines and the relevant regional instruments and standards. Several participants noted that the ISACS and IATGs currently do not make explicit reference to regional standards at control-measure levels (e.g. record-keeping) and that it is the task of the users to examine both global and regional standards to determine where complementarities are, including which standards have a higher control recommendation. While participants noted that this is currently the practice, one expert explained that not all users of the ISACS and IATGs may be in a position to accurately examine and determine which recommendations from global and

regional standards and instruments should be followed. In this regard, several participants noted that they prioritize sub/regional standards and instruments over the global instruments first when seeking to provide guidance to affected States on particular control recommendations.

3. Exploring essential security and safety elements from the ISACS and IATGs to strengthen WAM in conflict-affected settings (see Annexes 1 and 2)

The second and third sessions of the expert meeting were devoted to examining and identifying the essential security and safety elements from the ISACS and IATGs. The sessions focused on unpacking the interpretations of practitioners working in conflict-affected settings regarding the essential security and safety control measures from the global standards and guidelines, including how interpretation of the elements varied and what implications such variations may have on the implementation of the ISACS and IATGs in these settings.

Before undertaking this exercise, the organizers first introduced a guiding question to the participants: are there currently shared understandings among experts on which control measures from the ISACS and IATGs are considered essential to WAM in conflict-affected settings? Within this context, the organizers acknowledged that many practitioners in principle have a shared understanding on which control measures from the ISACS and IATGs are important, which of those control measures are priority items, and which associated risks exist if such measures are not undertaken. However, the organizers also recognized that conflict-affected settings vary significantly in context, actors, operational scope and available resources. In this regard, the organizers sought to systematically capture possible variation in practitioners' understandings when the standards and guidelines were operationalized on the ground. Such an examination enabled the organizers to study whether there were certain drivers in conflict-affected settings which influenced how practitioners decided to apply (or not apply) a given set of control measures from the ISACS and IATGs.

In undertaking this exercise, participants were provided with the results of a 2015 survey undertaken by UNIDIR, entitled "Weapons and Ammunition Management Evaluation Criteria for Basic Initial Assessments".[7] The survey—which was circulated to a select number of experts from States, United Nations and expert NGOs in advance of the meeting—was designed to gain initial insight into practitioners' interpretations of the importance, priority and risk levels associated with security and safety control measures from the ISACS and IATGs when conducting a storage assessment in conflict-affected settings.

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[7] This initial survey was conducted in 2015 under the first phase of the ISAP project. Given few highly qualified and experienced ammunition experts that operate in conflict-affected settings, the initial survey was limited a small number of participants from States, United Nations and expert NGOs that fit a restrictive selection criteria. The results of the survey are not intended to draw conclusions on how practitioners implement the ISACS and IATGs in conflict-affected settings. Rather, the survey is intended to help initiate and facilitate discussions at the technical level on which security and safety control measures could be considered as essential in conflict-affected settings and how might these elements be applied in such contexts.

The survey was divided into two sections: one section on security and one on safety. The security section drew mainly from the ISACS, focusing on measures related to physical security and stockpile management, access control, staff vetting, inventory management and other relevant security procedures. The security survey aimed to assess practitioners' interpretations of which control measures were most important and relevant in reducing the risk of diversion and illicit proliferation of weapons and ammunition from stockpiles in conflict-affected settings.

The safety section drew mainly from the IATGs, focusing on measures related to ammunition management authority, safety of personnel, public safety, safety of stocks, inspection and accounting of stocks, internal and external infrastructure and environmental considerations. The safety survey aimed to capture practitioners' interpretations of which control measures were most important and relevant in reducing the risk of unplanned explosions in conflict-affected settings.

Initial research—drawing from the survey and expert meeting findings—to identify essential security and safety elements applicable in conflicted-affected settings displayed varying levels of understanding among field practitioners. As regards security measures, many survey respondents and experts at the meeting identified the following elements to be of high importance and priority: use of risk assessments; separation of arms and ammunition; application of stringent controls for items that may be attractive to criminal and terrorist organizations (ACTO); ensuring robust physical security infrastructure; using locks; ensuring robust perimeter security surrounding storage facilities; ensuring the presence of guards; conducting access control procedures; vetting of staff; conducting local accounting of arms and ammunition; conducting stock checks and issue and receipt; ensuring action on loss and theft; and securely transporting arms and ammunition. Greater variation in understanding on security measures was observed in measures relevant to: the specificities of physical security infrastructure such as thickness of and materials used for walls, floors, and windows; ensuring physical perimeter security (the use and condition of lights, clear zones, drainage systems); conducting local accounting including ways to back up and keep records; and conducting methods to secure stocks inside a storage facility.

As regards safety measures, many survey respondents and experts at the meeting identified firefighting equipment and vegetation-related measures as well as safety operations to be high importance and priority elements. Greater variation in understanding was observed for the following safety elements: applicability of ammunition management policy; modalities and methods for inventory management; presence and condition of lifting/hoisting equipment; and details relevant to firefighting response capacity, explosive contents precautions (such as hazard marking systems), health and safety practices in the workplace, and cleaning plans for a given storage facility.

It is important to note that experts at the meeting identified several other security and safety elements which were not adequately covered in this research project's scope. These would need to be considered moving forward. Detailed results from the survey findings as well as inputs provided by the expert group can be found in Annexes 1 and 2.

3.1. Drivers that influence applicability of the ISACS and IATG in conflict-affected settings

When examining essential security and safety elements, the participants at the expert meeting identified three key drivers that influence how practitioners apply the ISACS and IATGs in conflict-affected settings and thereby contribute to variations in understandings among actors on the ground. The three key drivers are listed below:

3.1.1. Relevance of personal experience of practitioners

When validating the survey results, experts attempted to explain variations in responses. Throughout the course of the day, participants repeatedly highlighted the relevance of personal experience. For example, in response to a recommendation that the structure of buildings used for weapons storage should comply with national security standards, participants remarked that a person's response to this recommendation and understanding of "national security standards" were subject to their experience. Some attendees had experience of working in countries with old or outdated national standards, while others had encountered national standards that were purely aspirational and were unachievable given existing resources. On this example, participants argued that it was difficult to draw absolute conclusions on whether compliance with national security standards can be considered an essential control measure in conflict-affected settings.

This observation, however, raised important questions within the group:

- If certain control measures are not considered (for example, due to lack of adequate available resources), what alternative options could be suggested or considered to address the control need? Who decides, and based on what criteria, that a certain control measure (for example, compliance with a national security standard) is or is not essential for their working context? How is such a decision made, communicated and accepted by the national authority?

One participant recognized the risk of individual experiences dictating which control measures should be considered (or not considered) for implementation, and noted the need for a more systematic decision-making methodology. The group shared the view that variation in personal experience posed a particular challenge to defining a common set of essential control elements for conflict-affected settings.

3.1.2. Balance between achievability and effectiveness

The group agreed that, by their very nature, conflict-affected settings have resource constraints, including human, financial and technical resources. Participants highlighted the relevance of putting in place control measures that are both effective and achievable with the available resources on the ground. In this regard, several participants noted that essential control elements from the ISACS and IATGs for use in conflict-affected settings must be broad and flexible enough to allow practitioners to implement them with limited resource capacity. For example, some participants at the meeting noted the importance of ensuring that all materials used to construct a storage depot were available in-country. Others believed it was more important to use imported items if they improved security. The group generally agreed that guiding principles and rules from the ISACS and IATGs

were essential; however, it was also agreed that variations at the implementation level (for example, what materials are used for the construction of a wall and whether it met the desired standard level) did not always result in weakened security or safety.

Many participants agreed that regardless of the technique used to improve the security or safety of a storage depot, long-term maintenance options and sustainability considerations should be part of essential control elements. For example, the group strongly agreed that when considering intrusion detection systems, human control factors (such as access control by guards) represented the most essential control element over potential electric systems. This once again highlighted the consensus in the group that essential control elements from the ISACS and IATGs for conflict-affected settings must draw on measures that are both effective and achievable by wide range of actors.

3.1.3. Context is key

A recurring theme in the second and third sessions was the relevance of context. The group repeatedly highlighted the fact that, even within conflict-affected settings, context varied significantly, including the security context, geographic locations, external threat levels, available resources, and the national and international actors involved. For example, participants discussed whether signage for an ammunition storage depot should form a part of an essential control element for conflict-affected settings. The group discussion revealed that signage needs vary depending on whether a depot is in a dense urban centre or a rural location. There may also be a strategic need to conceal the depot, meaning that signage revealing its true purpose would be less than ideal. While this represented just one example, similar discussions were held by the participants on many other control measures. Given these variations in context, the organizers observed a need to further unpack the context in order to better identify how each essential control element was understood and applied in conflict-affected settings.

These initial findings merit further in-depth research and consultations at the technical level to help identify essential security and safety elements and their applicability and relevance in conflict-affected settings.

4.   Reflections by the group

The concluding session of this expert meeting sought to compile the day's key observations and provide a moment for reflection.

- **The ISACS and IATGs serve as aspirational frameworks to incrementally work towards.** One of the most prominent observations from a large majority of the experts present was that the ISACS and IATGs, as international voluntary guidelines and standards, were aspirational goals. They are not standards that can be implemented from day one. Experts agreed that they were too large and comprehensive for that to be the case, which makes their application particularly challenging in conflict-affected settings. For some at the meeting, this was a shortcoming of the ISACS and IATGs. One participant estimated that at least 18 months would be needed to design a training plan that incorporates all aspects of the IATGs, for example. In many cases, this was not feasible given limited resources and tight timelines.

- **Effective use of the ISACS and IATGs requires adequate dialogue among national and international actors at the national level prior to implementation.** The group reflected on the need for a national-level dialogue with host States which would work towards enhanced national ownership and prioritization of WAM activities. According to some experts, this dialogue could feed into a roadmap or master plan for WAM activities in a given State. In this context, one participant highlighted the fact that international voluntary guidelines and standards were as important for States in conflict-affected settings as for the States which support and fund WAM activities. Another participant expressed the view that while it was important to establish a national roadmap for WAM activities, it was equally important to some that a guideline for using international voluntary guidelines and standards be developed for use by national actors. Being a multifaceted and highly comprehensive document, the IATGs present a large amount of guidance to the technical practitioner working in a conflict-affected setting. For many, the sheer amount of information can be difficult to digest. Therefore, some experts saw value in organizing the IATGs, and other equally comprehensive guidelines and standards, into a more usable document for the field. In this context one participant reminded the group of the existence of the IATG implementation toolkit[8].

- **The ISACS and IATGs could benefit from a more tailored roll out and implementation plan for conflict-affected settings.** Experts raised the question of how the ISACS and IATGs' user base can be increased. Opinion was divided on this matter, with some seeing the widespread application of such standards and guidelines as beneficial whereas others favoured a more strategic and structured roll out. Some experts explained that at the policy level, increasing the ISACS and IATGs' user base was beneficial to the safe and secure management of arms and

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[8]   For more information, see https://www.un.org/disarmament/un-saferguard/toolkit/?

ammunition. At the technical level, increasing the user base was also preferable. However, many experts explained that there were several policy and practical issues which restricted this process. As regards policy considerations, the group recognized a need for greater clarity in peacekeeping mandates to work on, or operationalize, tasks related to arms and ammunition. Some participants proposed that, where relevant, peacekeeping and political missions be mandated to assist States on arms and ammunition management, which may facilitate the use of ISACS and IATGs. As regards practical issues, in addition to the sheer size of the ISACS and IATGs as documents, some experts highlighted that these standards and guidelines were published in a select number of languages, which for some States posed a practical hurdle to their application. Moreover, attempts to unofficially translate these guidelines into other languages have been challenging in the past, which drives home the importance of this point.

- Some participants explained that at times the introduction of the ISACS and IATGs to national authorities has been premature in conflict-affected settings. In these cases, it was not useful to agree to meet international voluntary guidelines and standards; **it would be preferable instead to work towards alignment as a way to make meaningful WAM progress**. This led one participant to suggest that a strategic document was needed to explain how international voluntary guidelines and standards can be used in developing national arms and ammunition technical guidelines. While this suggestion was not discussed further in the meeting, this comment did highlight the need for a concerted examination of how guidelines and standards can be more effectively applied in conflict-affected settings, where effective WAM activities are needed most. Deepening this aspect of the meeting's discussion may increase the intended impact of such guidelines and standards in WAM activities in these settings.

- **There is a continued need to further strengthen shared understandings among experts before a set of common essential control elements from the ISACS and IATGs can be defined.** Throughout the course of the expert meeting, participants were asked to explore and comment on responses from the aforementioned 2015 UNIDIR survey. Discussion centred on responses where little consensus among experts existed in the survey results. As regards moving forward with technical discussions on defining common essential control elements from the ISACS and IATGs, participants were asked whether UNDIR should focus on consolidating areas of consensus or attempting to clarify areas of limited agreement. For UNIDIR, any variation or areas of limited agreement are not seen as negatives. Rather, they shed valuable light on how these guidelines and standards were being conceptualized and then applied. On this question, the group acknowledged the value of focusing on both areas moving forward.

- **Flexibility in the use of the ISACS and IATGs should be further considered**. One participant reminded the group that while the overarching goal of international voluntary guidelines and standards is to make them usable in a diverse set of

contexts, it is important to remember that they are *voluntary*. This means that States can use them freely as they see fit. In this context, this participant felt that a conversation regarding *adherence* was not appropriate as these guidelines were not compliance documents. This intervention fit with comments by other participants noting that the use of the ISACS and IATGs should be seen as an alignment rather than an agreement to adhere to international voluntary guidelines and standards, specifically in conflict-affected settings.

5. UNIDIR observations

Given the recent roll out of the ISACS and IATGs, it is now crucial to obtain feedback on experiences regarding the use of these standards and guidelines in order to reflect on lessons learned, and commonly observed strengths and shortcomings, and to seek improvements in their use and applicability. This section presents several observations made by UNIDIR during the series of expert meetings on WAM in conflict-affected settings, as well as during its field missions in 2015 and 2016. The observations below do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of those involved in the expert meeting or the in-country activities undertaken with UNIDIR.

1) The ISACS and IATGs provide a crucial set of tools for strengthening national capacity in managing arms and ammunition and facilitating dialogue between national authorities and assistance providers in defining common objectives and targets for capacity building. Such standards and guidelines, while voluntary, serve as appropriate instruments to assess the strengths and shortcomings of WAM at the national level.

2) Using the ISACS and IATGs can help national authorities in their efforts to strengthen domestic arms and ammunition management policy and operational frameworks, highlight potential vulnerabilities and provide guidance for enhancing controls and interventions over the full lifecycle of WAM. Importantly, these standards can be useful tools to help design a national roadmap for WAM and provide benchmarks for implementing structural WAM reform, including the building of policy-making and supervisory capacity at the institutional level.

3) Initial experiences in using the ISACS and IATGs indicate that information on progress in implementing standards can be useful in underpinning policy dialogue between donors and recipients, and sharpening the focus of capacity-building efforts.

4) Implementing standards can be resource intensive. This issue will need to be addressed if a decision is made by Member States to pursue a programme to implement the standards more widely and systematically. In pursuit of meaningful implementation, technical assistance availability is key in conflict-affected settings. In this regard, the implementation of standards needs to be sequenced and prioritized based on each State's respective circumstances.

5) The periodic review of the implementation of these standards and guidelines and progress made is crucial in better understanding each situation and the needs of relevant States. It is also equally important in keeping standards and guidelines relevant and applicable.

6) A national review of WAM based on guidelines and standards needs to be led at a high level and undertaken by those national authorities responsible for their area of WAM operation in order to maximize meaningful feedback and enhance dialogue between stakeholders.

7) Ownership of, and commitment to, implementing control measures may also be enhanced by undertaking more intensified research on the relationship between

implementation of control measures, broader security and stability reform, and development.

Acronyms

ACTO   Attractive to Criminal and Terrorist Organizations

GICHD   Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining

IATGs   International Ammunition Technical Guidelines

ISACS   International Small Arms Control Standards

ISAP   UNIDIR Project "International Small Arms and Ammunition Guidance Platform"

ISO   International Organization for Standardization

NGO   non-governmental organization

PSSM   physical security and stockpile management

UN PoA   United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (A/CONF.192/15)

UNIDIR   United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research

WAM   weapon and ammunition management

Application of Global Voluntary Standards and Guidelines to Strengthen Weapon and Ammunition Management (WAM) in Conflict-affected Settings

Expert meeting organized by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD)

MEETING SUMMARY

This report provides a summary of the discussions which took place during a one-day technical expert meeting organized by UNIDIR and GICHD entitled, "Application of Global Voluntary Standards and Guidelines to Strengthen Weapon and Ammunition Management (WAM) in Conflict-affected Settings". The meeting took place on 19 September 2016 in Geneva, Switzerland. It was organized as part of UNIDIR's ISAP project Phase II (2016). Experts from States, United Nations agencies and expert NGOs attended the closed-door event.