

TU-BCPS Model United Nations 2023 Debate Scenario

“Transnational Organized Crime:

Illicit Trafficking and Misuse of Firearms as a Threat to Global Security”

The United Nations reports that one billion firearms are in circulation worldwide, and that their use in lethal violence is prevalent on every populated continent. For several decades, weapons trade has been among the most lucrative businesses in the world. The illicit trafficking and misuse of firearms is intrinsically linked to organized criminal organizations and networks that have elastic structures and the ability to move quickly, transform, and be controlled from multiple locations. Illicit arms trade fuels armed conflicts, crime, human rights violations, and insecurity. Oftentimes, different forms of criminality are intertwined, such as human, firearms, illicit drug trafficking, and terrorism (UNODC Global Firearms Programme; UNODA Arms Trade).

The dividing line between legal and illicit firearms trade is not always easy to draw and depends on national legal frameworks and international law. In general, there are three categories of firearms transfers: 1) *Legal or regulated transfers*, which include legally manufactured firearms that are transferred between parties in accordance with respective national and international law; 2) *Illicit grey-market transfers*, which include some authorized elements while other aspects may be illicit, such as when authorized by either importing or exporting country but not both, or may occur when governments or their agents exploit loopholes or circumvent national and/or international law; and 3) *Illegal black-market transfers*, which clearly violate national and/or international law, or which take place without official government consent or control, including cases of diversion and illicit cross-border trafficking. Black-market firearms include, therefore, all illegally brokered, traded, diverted or trafficked arms, or those in active criminal, insurgency or terrorist hands, or stockpiled by such groups (The Illicit Market in Firearms).

No region in the world is exempt from the devastating consequences of illicit firearms violence. Illicit firearms fuel armed conflicts, terrorism, and gang violence in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, where the death toll and humanitarian consequences are enormous. Furthermore, even more lives are lost worldwide from non-conflict firearm events (UNODC Global Firearms Programme). More than 500 people die every day because of violence committed with legal and illicit firearms. Between 2012 and 2016, more than 1.4 million firearm-related deaths occurred globally (Amnesty International). While anyone can be affected by firearm violence, often gun violence disproportionately impacts communities of color, women, and other marginalized groups in their societies.

The global illicit trafficking of firearms is directly linked to terrorist activity and the funding thereof, and, consequently, represents a global security threat (The Illicit Market in Firearms). From 2010 to 2020, illicit firearms were used in 85,148 terrorist attacks that caused 193,172 fatalities worldwide. Illicit firearms provide terrorist organizations with the ability to exert control over populations and territories, allowing them to extort, tax, or kidnap for ransom. Additionally, terrorists financially benefit from the illicit trafficking of firearms in at least two ways. First, terrorist organizations supply firearms to traffickers of weapons and other illicit goods, including drugs. The payments received are used to fund terrorist operations and activities. Second, terrorist organizations provide protection from theft and

armed robbery for international illicit drug shipments by forcefully controlling entry points or trafficking routes (ICCT).

The problems associated with illicit firearms violence covers the whole spectrum of human security: ranging from high levels of individual physical insecurity (domestic violence and street, gang and criminal violence) with serious economic and social consequences for the society at large, to large scale armed conflicts in which these arms enable widespread violence and account for the majority of deaths (UNODC Global Firearms Programme).

Illicit trafficking of firearms has a negative impact on all of the core pillars of the UN's work, from security and conflict prevention, to human rights, sustainable development, economic development, and gender equality. They are factors in a large range of human rights violations, including the killing and maiming of children, rape, and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence. Firearms also play a role in displacement, environmental degradation, and food insecurity (UN News). The ready availability of weapons and ammunition leads to human suffering, political repression, crime, and terror among civilian populations. Irresponsible arms transfers can destabilize an entire region, enable violations of arms embargoes, fund criminal organizations, and contribute to human rights abuses. Illicit trafficking of firearms disrupts development and discourages investment in countries experiencing conflict and high levels of violence. Countries affected by conflict or pervasive crime have the most difficulty attaining internationally agreed development goals and development funds due to higher levels of corruption and insecurity (UNODA Arms Trade).

The problems associated with criminality and firearms are of such a complex nature, that curtailing them requires tailored criminal justice responses that promote prevention, investigation, and prosecution of crimes (UNODC Global Firearms Programme). UN Member States are committed to “significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows” under SDG Target 16.4 (UNODC Global Study on Firearms Trafficking, 12).

Notable points regarding the illicit trafficking of firearms (From the [Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020](#) unless otherwise noted):

- The illicit trafficking of firearms is an estimated \$1 billion annual industry (Council on Foreign Relations).
- A total of 550,000 firearms were reported as seized globally during each of 2016 and 2017. The real number is much higher, as some countries underreported their seizures.
- Pistols are the world's most seized type of firearm.
- More than 50 percent of homicides globally are carried out using firearms.
- The Americas is the region that reported the most seized firearms overall. Pistols constituted more than 50 percent of the total firearms seized in the Americas.
- In Africa and Asia, shotguns were the most prominent type of seized firearm. However, many countries in Africa and Asia appear to have a lower capacity to intercept and report trafficked firearms, which may lead to underreporting of some types of firearms.

- Rifles were the main type of firearm seized in Oceania, and in Europe the distribution was more equal between pistols, rifles, and shotguns.
- Cross-border seizures are most common at land crossings, but sea shipments are bigger. It appears that the vast majority of seizure cases entail law enforcement officers intercepting a single firearm or a very small number, according to available data.
- Violent crime and drug trafficking are frequently linked with firearms seizures.

Given that these examples represent only a few of the many challenges associated with transnational organized crime and the illicit trafficking of firearms, please consider the following:

1. What is the connection between human rights violations, corruption, and transnational organized crime? What is the relationship between illicit trafficking of firearms and finance from illicit sources? How does corruption intensify existing transnational organized crime? What policies can be instituted that will reduce corruption and also lower illicit trafficking of firearms? How does corruption at border crossings exacerbate transnational organized crime and illicit trafficking of firearms?
2. How does illicit trafficking of firearms relate to children's rights? How does illicit trafficking of firearms hinder the educational development of children? What can be done to protect children from firearms violence in developing states? How can the UN address the socioeconomic factors that cause children to become involved with transnational organized crime? How is illicit trafficking of firearms connected to child recruitment as soldiers in terrorist organizations, insurgencies, and other armed conflicts? What measures can be taken to address these factors?
3. How does illicit trafficking of firearms relate to economic and social development? How does transnational organized crime hinder the economic and social development of a country? How is transnational organized crime related to economic and social development? What can the UN do to address these issues? How does transnational organized crime affect current development programs of the UN and the ability of past and future programs to address economic and social inequality? What measures could be taken to address these effects?
4. How does illicit trafficking of firearms relate to the environment? How is illicit trafficking of firearms driven by environmental issues? How is transnational organized crime connected to the environment? What kinds of solutions exist to combat firearms violence related to impoverished, overpopulated, or polluted areas? What impact might sustainable development initiatives have on reducing transnational organized crime? How is illicit trafficking of firearms related to these environmental issues?
5. How does illicit trafficking of firearms relate to health? How do health issues exacerbate illicit trafficking of firearms? How does firearms violence worsen health issues? How does firearms violence impact healthcare systems worldwide which already lack the resources and funding to adequately respond to healthcare needs? What can be done to assist populations who lack access to adequate healthcare? How does the Covid-19 pandemic intensify existing healthcare-related firearms violence? How is transnational organized crime connected to these issues? What can the UN do to address transnational organized crime healthcare issues related to the pandemic?

6. How is illicit trafficking of firearms connected to human rights? How is firearms violence connected to human rights? How can the UN protect member states from the negative impacts of transnational organized crime and illicit trafficking of firearms while also protecting individual human rights? What is the UN doing about firearms violence connected to human rights problems, such as forced prostitution, slavery, and forced labor? Should security be placed above human rights, such as freedom of movement, the right to life, and the right to pursue economic freedom? Why or why not? Where can/should compromises be made and why?

7. How are transnational organized crime and illicit trafficking of firearms related to protecting disadvantaged populations? How can the international community better protect disadvantaged populations from firearms violence? What, if any, actions should the international community do to reduce transnational organized crime that targets social and economic groups? How can the UN hold accountable states that refuse to keep their agreements related to illicit trafficking of firearms? What about states that ignore or promote firearms violence within their borders?

8. How are transnational organized crime and illicit trafficking of firearms related to refugees and forced displacement? How does firearms violence cause forcible displacement? What are the existing transnational organized crime issues that force marginalized groups to leave their places of origin? What is the relationship between forced displacement and finance from illicit sources? What can the UN do to mitigate the relationship between human traffickers, refugees/IDPs, and organized crime? What about so-called 'everyday corruption' at border crossings, which may exacerbate forced displacement issues?

9. How are transnational organized crime and illicit trafficking of firearms connected to sustainable communities? How are farmers in poor countries impacted by illicit drug cultivation and transnational organized drug distribution networks? How are rural, undeveloped areas dependent on transnational organized crime for their economic survival? How can the UN encourage alternative development programs for people who rely on transnational organized crime networks for their financial sustainability? How do high rates of crime and violence in urban areas undermine growth and impede social development? How can developing states create sustainable communities with their limited resources? What should be the role of the UN? Of developed states?

10. What security challenges exist when seeking to protect states, people, and the international community from security issues connected to transnational organized crime and illicit trafficking of firearms? What security challenges are connected to the illicit trafficking of firearms? How does illicit trafficking of firearms trigger violence? Do current security protocols provide an appropriate response to non-state actors that recruit impoverished and marginalized peoples for transnational organized crime? Why or why not? What measures might be more effective? How would these measures reduce firearms violence?

11. How do transnational organized crime and illicit trafficking of firearms relate to science and technology? What is the relationship between firearms violence and access to technology? Do science and technology developments lead to more or less illicit trafficking of firearms and why? How can the international community harness science and technology to reduce illicit trafficking of firearms and its associated violence?

12. How are transnational organized crime and illicit trafficking of firearms connected to trade and development between and within countries? How can the UN reduce transnational organized crime using trade and development? What trade and development policies promote the reduction of transnational organized crime and illicit trafficking of firearms? How does (or not) promoting trade between developed and developing countries impact issues of transnational organized crime and illicit trafficking of firearms?

References

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Links to Related Resources

- [UN Office for Disarmament Affairs \(UNODA\)](#)
- [UN Office on Drugs and Crime \(UNODC\)](#)
- [UNODC: The Illicit Market in Firearms](#)
- [UNODC Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020](#)
- [UNODC Global Firearms Programme](#)
- [Arms Trade Treaty \(ATT\)](#)
- [UN Security Council Resolution 2370 \(2017\)](#)