

Introduction

Lesotho as a country does not manufacture any kind of weapons, including Small Arms and Light Weapons. But as part of the international Community, Lesotho remains committed on the implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons and shares the concerns of the international community that the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons poses a serious threat to both national and international security and stability. Lesotho takes the spread of illegal fire arms as a great concern as these arms are widely used in armed robberies, murders and stock theft, among other crimes.

Lesotho's international obligations in arms control

In fulfilment of the international obligations by Lesotho regarding the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, the country has just recently (just before the RevCon3) submitted her national report on the implementation of the UNPOA on Small Arms and Light Weapons (politically binding). Lesotho also ratified the Arms Trade Treaty (Legally binding) in January 2016. Lesotho is also Party to the SADC Protocol on the Control of Firearms, Ammunition and other Related Materials. There is also the Bamako Declaration that Lesotho is bound by its provisions. Lesotho is also a member of the Southern Africa Regional Police Chiefs Cooperation Organisation (SARPCCO) and participates in its activities like facilitating cooperation and coordination in combating the illicit trafficking of SALW, misuse and proliferation and many other activities.

Domestic regulation of SALW

On the domestic level regarding regulation of SALW, the country is currently reviewing her national laws to conform with the requirements of the international instruments on conventional weapons that Lesotho is Party to and to that effect Cabinet has approved the drafting of the law to control Small Arms and Light Weapons and hopefully the process will not take long so that it can be presented before parliament, and pass into law. This process is long overdue as our current legislation does not fully conform to the international and regional agreements in most aspects of firearms control. Legislation in place currently is as follows; Internal Security (Arms and Ammunition) Act No. 17 of 1966 and the Internal Security Amendment Act of 1999.

The purpose of this law is to regulate and control firearms and other weapons and ammunition. Under this law it is an offence for anyone or a company to purchase and possess firearms and ammunition without a firearm certificate. As well as transfer of SALW or operating such is a criminal offence to do so without a licence. On record keeping there is a Central Firearms Registry which operates manually. The law in this regard does not require the maintenance of records (for not less than 10 years) as per the provisions of the international agreements. There is also Private Security Officers Act 2002 that regulates and exercises control over their establishment, types of firearms, types of storage and equipment to use which are (prescribed in the Private Security Officers Regulations of 2003.

Other activities/control measures

State-owned firearms are being marked, though there are challenges pertaining to resources. The Lesotho Police has a Special Operations Unit (SOU) established in 2002, which is responsible for the tracing and recovery of illegal firearms in the country. Collection and destruction of illicit firearms is also carried out, though destruction is not carried out annually as it should, due to budgetary constraints. There are control measures put in place; a competency test is carried out before one can be issued with a firearm license, screening of applications which requires a police clearance and a vetting report among other things. There is also a voluntary surrendering of illicit firearms where those who surrendered will be pardoned.

Gender dimension in SALW

Lesotho does support the inclusion and active participation of women in issues of SALW including in policy making level although at the moment there has not been a lot that has been done, except that we believe that having the Minister responsible for police as a woman is a big step towards a gender sensitive approach in SALW issues in the country. I should mention that she has served as a senior police officer for a long time before she went into politics. Furthermore, as a SARPCCO member, Lesotho takes part in the simultaneous operation under SARPCCO called Operation Basali (meaning Women's Operation). Although its focus is on the arrest of wanted persons on crimes committed against women and vulnerable persons, not control of illicit firearms, some gender-based violence crimes are committed with the use of firearms.

Challenges

Although Lesotho is committed in achieving her objectives in implementing obligations under international and regional obligations, the country is faced with challenges like the manual record keeping; stockpile management due to lack of resources and capacity.

Thank you for your attention