

ISIS focus

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Mexico and the Fight Against the Irregular Trade in Arms

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Source: Flickr/Jonathan James

For centuries, trade has been one of the drivers of civilisation. Aside from being a tool for progress and development for humankind, it has also motivated conflict and has been used for criminal activities. That is why, over time, trade has been subject to regulations through multiple international agreements.

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It was henceforth difficult to explain why it had not been possible to regulate the international trade of such sensitive products as arms, until the recent adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly only two years ago.

The ATT expressly prohibits arms transfers whenever there are sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council or when they can be used to commit genocide, war crimes or crimes against humanity.

The *Non-Violence* sculpture by Carl Fredrick Reuterswård outside the United Nations Headquarters in New York City



Source: UN News Centre

For the first time, the treaty establishes common international rules and standards to regulate the international trade of conventional weapons and to prevent and eliminate their illicit trafficking. The ATT expressly prohibits arms transfers whenever there are sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council or when they can be used to commit genocide, war crimes or crimes against humanity.



Source: www.peacewomen.org

Furthermore, States Parties are bound not to authorise arms sales if there is a manifest risk that they may be used to commit or facilitate terrorist acts or offenses associated to transnational organised crime. The treaty also has explicit provisions on human rights, including measures to prevent gender-based violence.

In sum, the ATT is a true achievement by the international community. It is the result of the joint efforts between civil society and a coalition of countries committed to control this scourge, in which Mexico played a key role.

To guarantee these purposes, the treaty established the creation of a registry, which will be fed by annual reports from States Parties regarding their imports and exports of weapons. The cross reference of these reports will allow the identification of possible discrepancies revealing illegal transfers of conventional arms.

This process will facilitate the tracking and confiscation of weapons possessed illegally, and the punishment of smugglers.

The preventive nature of the treaty is therefore obvious, as is its potential to tackle the illicit arms market, which is a breeding ground for transnational organised crime and for human rights violations.

Be it for its relevance, for the urgency of the matter, or for the fact that this is the first international instrument on security affairs adopted by the UN in a decade, the truth is that the international community has responded enthusiastically, ratifying the treaty at an unprecedented rate. This allowed for its rapid entry into force on 24 December 2014, just 20 months after its adoption, and thus led to conveying the First Conference of States Parties to the ATT. Its main objective is to establish the institutional framework of the treaty's regime by adopting its rules of procedure, as well as the necessary financial and operational arrangements.

Given the importance that Mexico adheres to this issue, evidenced in its activism on security and arms control affairs in general and in its active participation during the negotiation of the treaty, we offered to host this first conference, undertaking a complex preparatory process.

This landmark event, which took place in Cancun, included a high-level segment, chaired by Foreign Minister Jose Antonio Meade Kuribeña, and the participation of

Foreign Minister, Jose Antonio Meade Kuribeña, opened the First Conference of States Parties to the ATT on 24 August 2015



Source: Embassy of Mexico in Malaysia

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Foreign Ministers from several countries, as well as senior UN officials and representatives of civil society and industry from all around the world.

With its great host credentials, extensive diplomatic tradition and its recognised ability to forge agreements between different positions, Mexico made a significant contribution during the four-day meeting to the consolidation of a regime that has the potential to reduce substantially the illicit trade in conventional arms and thus protect the lives and rights of millions of human beings around the world.

This was a Paper for the First Conference of the State Parties to the ATT, held from 24 to 27 August 2015 in Cancun, Mexico. This article was originally published in Spanish in "Milenio" on 24 August 2015.

