

UNLIREC Newsletter

Caribbean States strengthen their commitment to counter Illicit firearms trafficking

Reduction in the high levels of armed violence is currently one of the main objectives of Caribbean States in the field of security. In this connection, many of the Caribbean governments have elaborated national strategies to tackle the proliferation of illicit firearms trafficking, which constitutes one of the main threats to public security.

The Caribbean region has one of the highest murder rates in the world. In February 2010, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) released a global analysis on homicide rates which revealed that these rates increased from 19.9 to 32.6 per 100,00 inhabitants between 2003 and 2008, contrary to the world trend of reduction and stabilization of these type of crimes.

The increase in the use of more deadly weapons has led to an ascent of mortality rates. A fundamental factor contributing to the growing prevalence of criminality in the region is drug trafficking, which facilitates the availability of firearms necessary for the protection and transport of smuggled goods and illicit drugs. In this context, and bearing in mind that an increase in demand for firearms is taking

place, the illicit trade has become a challenge for Caribbean States.

According to the reports that the Latin American and Caribbean countries submit to the UN-Comtrade database, the imports of licit small arms and light weapons between 2001 and 2008 amounted to 1.5 million dollars. This number however is an underestimation when one takes into account that not all the countries report on their activities every year. Little is known about the firearms which enter the region in an illicit manner. The geography of the Caribbean requires an additional effort by the police forces given that they are small island States with extensive maritime borders, which remain vulnerable to the activities of criminal organizations.

Strengthening stockpile management and firearms destruction

In this context and responding to requests for assistance from States in the region, the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (UN-LIREC) initiated a technical assistance programme in 8 targeted States in the Caribbean to improve stockpile management and firearms, ammunition

and explosives destruction procedures. This project benefited from the support of the Government of the United States.

During the first phase of the assistance programme, UN-LiREC experts conducted technical missions to the Bahamas, Belize, Grenada, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago to carry out joint evaluations with the national authorities on stockpile management and on the number of firearms, ammunition and explosives ready to be destroyed.

According to UN-LiREC's Director, it is fundamental for the Regional Centre to provide the Caribbean States with technical assistance, which contributes to strengthening the national strategies on the control of illicit firearms trafficking. In a second phase, destruction of surplus, obsolete and confiscated weapons and the enhancing of the capacity of law enforcement personnel in the prevention and combating of illicit firearms trafficking are foreseen.

Coordinated action of the United Nations in Jamaica

In countries like Jamaica, insecurity in the streets is one of the government's top concerns and one of the main obstacles to economic development. In 2009, the World Bank reported that the cost of criminality in this nation represented 5% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

According to data supplied by the Jamaican Police Force - quoted by the Inter-American Observatory on Security of the Organization of American States (OAS) – in 2009, 62 homicides occurred per

100,000 inhabitants. Given that this situation has been ascending over the last decade - from 34 murders in the year 2000 to 62 in 2009 - the Jamaican government requested the support of different United Nations agencies in order to arrive at a solution to this, as well as to other social problems.

In response to this request, the strategic partners of the UN inter-agency taskforce for the Armed Violence Prevention Programme (AVPP) – with a mission to promote effective armed violence prevention and responses founded upon the understanding of the dynamics and impact of armed violence and the context in which it thrives, as well as on best practices generated by armed violence prevention initiatives to date - carried out an inter-agency mission this September to Jamaica to assess the situation in the field and to gather first-hand information in order to propose a coordinated UN agency response to combating armed violence. Representatives of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Health Organisation (WHO), UN-LiREC, UN-Habitat, UNICEF and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) participated in this mission in order to coordinate the creation of a joint project which aims at improving the armed violence indicators in Jamaica. Within this proposal, UN-LiREC will serve as the lead agency on firearms issues.

Gender issues

The Caribbean is no exception to the rule, the majority of the victims of firearms, as well as their perpetrators, are men. The increase in civilian ownership of firearms worries governments and law enforcement entities alike as women

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become potential victims of domestic violence. The increase in the cases of violence against women in the region constitutes proof of this tendency. According to a joint UNODC and World Bank report presented in 2007 “ Crime, Violence and Development: Trends, Costs and Policy Options in the Caribbean”, three Caribbean countries rank amongst the top 10 countries in the world in which most violations against women occur. In order to strengthen UN-LiREC’s commitment to gender equality and to emphasize gender mainstreaming in its activities, the 1st Inter-Institutional Training Course for Combating Illicit Firearms Trafficking (IITC), organized exclusively for female law enforcement personnel of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, will take place from 22 November to 3 December in Lima, Peru. This pioneering course for women, which is foreseen to be organized in other countries of the region, will include specialized modules on gender, UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security, and the Secretary General’s campaign entitled “unite to end violence against women”, in addition to traditional IITC modules.

UN-LiREC in the Caribbean

The Firearms Destruction and Stockpile Management Assistance Package in the Caribbean includes:

- Elaboration of assessments that determine the capacity of States to control arms, ammunition and explosives in order to prevent their diversion through the design of physical infrastructure and periodic destruction, including through the analysis of national legislation.
- Technical assistance to improve stockpile management and firearms destruction
- Training for government officials on stockpile management and arms destruction best practices.
- Advice on the elaboration of the pilot National Action Plan on stockpile management and firearms destruction which includes the identification of the technical and financial resources necessary for its implementation.
- Creation of networks with other Caribbean governments to improve coordination and information exchange.

UN-LiREC and the OAS will collaborate on legal matters to study the implementation of the CIFTA in Central America

The United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (UN-LiREC) and the Organization of American States (OAS) signed an agreement in July 2010 to study how the national legislation of Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Panama comply with the obligations of the Inter-

American Convention Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunitions and Explosives and Other Related Materials (CIFTA).

UN-LiREC’s Disarmament Policy-making Programme Coordinator, Ms Sonia Fernandez, indicated that this agreement reflects a solid relationship between the

two organizations which seeks to provide more comprehensive assistance to Central American States through international cooperation. The CIFTA, an OAS binding instrument for State Parties, was created in 1997 with the aim of reducing the harmful effects of illicit firearms trafficking.

This initiative is being carried out within the framework of the “Central American Stockpile Management and Firearms Destruction” Programme (OAS Public Security Department) and the 2001 Memorandum of Understanding between the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States and the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs.

Participants in UN-LiREC training courses become multiplying agents in the fight against illicit firearms trafficking

UN-LiREC’s trademark Inter-institutional Training Courses on Combating Illicit Firearms Trafficking (IITC) continues to exert a positive impact on law enforcement personnel throughout the region. The national courses carried out in Bolivia and Panama and the sub-regional course undertaken in Costa Rica demonstrate the usefulness of investing in institutional capacities of the law enforcement community.

Several of the 170 participants, amongst them public prosecutors, judges, intelligence officers and customs personnel, and members of the armed forces of various countries throughout the region have expressed that the knowledge acquired during the course has served them not only in their daily work, but has been shared with their colleagues in order to enhance their commitment to the fight against the illicit trafficking in firearms.

The deputy-head of the Arms and Explosives Operations Unit of the Public Security Ministry of San José in Costa Rica, Mr Kevin Brown, enunciated that following his participation in UN-LiREC’s

IITC, he is now implementing the systematization of firearms characteristics and is studying various marking options that could be used both for governmental arms and for those entering the country through customs and tax warehouses. The Chief Inspector of the National Civilian Police of El Salvador, Mr Douglas Campos García, who currently serves as the Chief of the Updating and Specialties Unit of the National Public Security Academy (NPSA)) of El Salvador further said that he shared what he had learned in UN-LiREC’s IITC with the participants of the NPSA’s specialization course on topics related to research, intelligence, weapons and explosives.

For some of the other participants, such as the Analyst of the Intelligence and Security Directorate of the Ministry of the Presidency of Costa Rica, Ms Marjorie Rojas Cordero, and the judge of the criminal court of the same country, Mr Max Antonio Escalante, the commitment to “multiplying” the acquired knowledge is not limited to the labour environment, but also touches family members and friends in an effort to raise awareness of the

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problems posed by firearms: “I have changed my mentality, because I am now more aware of the dire consequences that the proliferation of the illicit trade in firearms, munitions and explosives, as well as its link to other serious crimes, has upon society”.

The IITC has led to the training of over 2,700 members of the law enforcement community in 46 courses throughout the Latin American and Caribbean region since its creation in 2004. The overall aim of the IITC is to promote the prevention and eradication of illicit firearms trafficking throughout the region.

This ten-day course is made up of both theoretical and practical segments broken down into seven different modules ranging from the basic concepts on firearms, ammunition and explosives, and the tools to identify and trace illicit arms, to the international instruments and normative frameworks applicable in the Latin American and Caribbean context and the basic intelligence and practical techniques used to conduct criminal investigations. While the practical component begins with the analysis of an intelligence report and culminates with the presentation of evidence before a judge during a preliminary hearing.

UN-LiREC promotes interagency coordination in Central America on combating illicit firearms trafficking

In order to facilitate coordination among the different agencies of the United Nations system in the provision of assistance to Central American States, the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNLiREC) - as the CASA (Coordinating Action on Small Arms Mechanism) focal point in the region - invited other United Nations agencies to the first-of-its-kind coordination meeting in Panama City last July.

The meeting facilitated the exchange of information among all participating UN agencies, including UN-LiREC, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Organization of American States (OAS), and the Central American Programme on Small Arms and Light Weapons Control (CASAC) on the different requests for assistance made by

Central American States in areas, such as stockpile management and firearms destruction, legal assistance and law enforcement personal training, amongst others.

Following an evaluation, which took into account the technical and financial capacity of each UN participating entity, a planning session took place with the aim of delineating the responsibilities of each organization in the upcoming months. In this sense, UN agencies agreed on the importance of coordinating activities to avoid duplicating efforts and to further contribute to the work already undertaken.

The second coordination meeting will take place within the framework of the “Central American commitment: a space to build a safe region” event that will take place in Panama City from 25-29 October

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2010. The event will be organized by the General Secretariat of the Central American Integration System (SG-SICA), UN-LiREC and UNDP with the support of the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID). The Coordinating Action on Small Arms (CASA) mechanism was established in 1998 as a United Nations tool for the formulation and implementation of a

multidisciplinary and coherent approach to the problem of the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons. During this same year, the Secretary-General designated the Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) as the focal point for coordinating all action on SALW within the United Nations system. UN-LiREC serves as UNODA's focal point for CASA in the Latin America and Caribbean region.

UNLIREC Agenda (Oct-Dec 2010)

October

- ✓ *VII Seminar on Small Arms and Light Weapons*
Cartagena de las Indias – Colombia

November

- ✓ *Facilitation Event on UNSCR 1540 (2004)*
Lima – Peru
- ✓ *III Seminar on Armed Violence and Development*
La Antigua – Guatemala
- ✓ *I Inter-Institutional Training Course on Combating Illicit Firearms Trafficking (IITC) for Female Law Enforcement Officials*
Lima – Peru

December

- ✓ *United Nations and Caribbean Regional Workshop on Firearms Destruction and Stockpile Management*
Port of Spain – Trinidad and Tobago

United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean

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