



SMUS MODEL
UNITED NATIONS

DISEC Background Guide

Letter from Director

Dear Delegates,

My name is Paul Holland, and it is an honour to serve as director of DISEC this year. Since starting Model UN in Grade 7, I have attended numerous conferences, during which I have had the pleasure of representing a wide variety of countries, political parties, and historical figures in various committees. This year is my first year participating as a staff member at a conference, and I aim to make it as enjoyable and welcoming of an experience as possible for everyone involved.

Since staff assignments were finalized and committee preparation began, the Dias committee has been working hard to iron out the details of the committee and make sure everything goes as smoothly as possible. Speaking of which, I would like to introduce this year's dias, consisting of myself, chair Kyumin Kim, and co-assistant directors Rachel Oliver and Liam Kingsbury. I am incredibly grateful for the hard work of the dias committee for all their work in preparation for this year's conference, as well as this year's secretariat for running the entire event, figuring out all the logistics and working behind the scenes to ensure that the conference as a whole goes well.

This year, DISEC will be debating the implications of the recent growth in the trade of illicit firearms, as well as discussing possible solutions to this pressing issue. Though this topic was initially chosen last year, all information in the background guide has been updated for currency and is accurate to the modern-day situation regarding this subject. To succeed in this committee, it will be important not only to have a strong understanding of your country's position and the current situation, but also to be able to consider the different future repercussions of proposed solutions concerning such a widespread and complex issue. We hope that the many intricacies of this topic will allow for fruitful debate and the creation of innovative solutions to this problem, bringing multiple perspectives into discussion and encouraging collaboration over the course of committee sessions.

If any questions or issues arise during your preparations, please feel free to contact me at paul.holland@smus.ca. Otherwise, good luck, and I look forward to seeing everyone at the conference in November!

Best Regards,
Paul Holland
DISEC Director

Position Paper Policy

What is a Position Paper?

A position paper is a brief overview of a country's stance on the topics being discussed by a particular committee. Though there is no specific format the position paper must follow, it should include a description of your positions your country holds on the issues on the agenda, relevant actions that your country has taken, and potential solutions that your country/government would support. Each position paper should not exceed one page, excluding works cited, and should all be combined into a single document per delegate (for double delegations this means only one delegate needs to submit the paper for both). For DISEC position papers, although strongly recommended, are not required. However, delegates who wish to be considered for an award must submit position papers. If delegates choose to write their position paper with the help of AI, they will also not be eligible to receive awards.

Formatting

Position papers should:

- Include the name of the delegate, their country, and the committee
- Be in a standard font (e.g. Times New Roman) with a 12-point font size and 1-inch document margins
- Not include illustrations, diagrams, decorations, national symbols, watermarks, or page borders
- Include citations and a bibliography, in any format, giving due credit to the sources used in research (not included in the 1-page limit)
- Not be written by Large Language models (AI), as this does not align with school and SMUSMUN policy. (If you require further clarification, please contact us.)

Due Dates And Submission Procedure

Position papers for this committee must be submitted by 11:59 PM PT on November 18, 2025.

Once your position paper is complete, please save the file as your last name, your first name and send it as an attachment in an email to your committee's email address, with the subject heading as "[last name] [first name] — Position Paper". Please do not add any other attachments to the email. Your position paper should be submitted in PDF format; position papers submitted in another format will not be accepted. Each position paper will be manually reviewed and considered for the Best Researched award.

Please send all Position Papers to paul.holland@smus.ca.

Overview

In simple terms, illicit firearms trafficking is the movement of firearms such as guns between international borders without permission of the government or through illegal means.¹ A significant portion of weapons trafficked worldwide are between Mexico and the United States (US) leading to the US having one of the most restrictive and detailed plans to actively combat the issue. Despite attempts, the fact remains that because the US has limited restrictions on the purchasing of firearms, it is difficult to prevent their purchasing and therefore their ability to be trafficked. And, because of a lack of proper tracking of these firearms, the number trafficked between these two countries alone in 2022 was between 72,819 and 258,101.²

Worldwide, an average of 500,000 firearms are seized worldwide, however a report published by United Nations of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in 2020 suspects the number to be much higher as many countries choose not to disclose the actual number to protect their national interests and sovereignty.³ The UNODC also reports a correlation between levels of violent crime and drug trafficking with the number of weapons seized, particularly in Latin American and African countries.⁴ The flows of firearms also denote that most trafficked weapons originate from a few places, the US/Canada, Germany, or India as well as within areas such as North Africa, the Middle East, the United States, East Asia, and South America.⁵ There is no country immune to the web of illegal firearms trafficking, no matter their GDP, political stability, or international standing.

The United Nations has attempted to stop and prevent the trafficking of firearms, primarily by seizing weapons at international borders, and attempting to implement restrictions on the purchasing of firearms. The United States for example, has implemented stricter control at their borders, checking for weapons, however, the fact still remains that it is quite simple to walk into a gun store and purchase a weapon without a permit and proper identification. The trafficking of weapons can also have significant implications on global and civil conflicts. Using the Syrian civil war as an example, after the collapse of the Assad regime, weapons across Syria and Lebanon have been taken by local militias such as the Syrian Arab Army (SAA), leading to mass seizures across Syria.⁶ Groups like Hezbollah, an Iranian UN classified terrorist group, have taken advantage of the available weaponry, impacting their own conflicts and causing more problems for all governments and groups involved.⁷ Illicit firearms trafficking remains a significant and relevant issue to this day, and it is important to discuss what measures can be taken among members of DISEC to prevent and regulate the distribution of firearms.

¹ United States Government, "Weapons Trafficking," U.S Immigration and Customs Enforcement

² "Here's how we figured," The Conversation

³ *Global Study*, 7

⁴ *Global Study*, 8

⁵ *Global Study*, 9

⁶ Hartley et al., "Every Gun Was Taken," Inkstick

⁷ Ibid

Timeline and Historical Analysis

Though the mass-production of weapons began around the time of the industrial revolution, the trafficking of illicit arms did not become a significant issue until the mid-20th century. It has recently become a far more prevalent issue with the increase in armed conflicts globally and rising power of regional non-state actors.

Pre World War II:

Despite the fact that the first major instances of illicit arms trading recorded occurred after the Second World War, the roots of the business can be traced back centuries.⁸ In the 16th and 17th centuries, European traders began to lay down the groundwork for modern arms trafficking, selling firearms and other weapons in North America, Africa, and Asia. The access to such weapons under weak colonial governance structures led to increased division and strained tensions in these areas, setting the stage for future conflicts which necessitated access to cheap, unregulated weapons for parties without the funds to acquire them legitimately.⁹

Cold War: 1947 - 1991

After the end of the Second World War, conflicting ideologies between the Western and Eastern Blocs led to increasing tensions worldwide. However, due to the presence of nuclear weapons, full-scale wars were not a feasible option. Instead, the main superpowers of the time, the United States and the Soviet Union, turned to funding proxy wars in order to increase global influence without direct combat between the two nations.¹⁰ Eventually, weapons used in these conflicts would often end up in illegal markets where they were sold internationally to different groups.¹¹

Post-Cold War: 1991 - 1999:

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, changes in power in former Soviet-controlled or influenced nations led to multiple conflicts,¹² adding on to the many that already existed in Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.¹³ The lack of strong governance after the exit of former colonial powers in many of these areas led to power vacuums, causing armed conflicts between opposing factions vying for control. With the surplus of weapons in these areas after previous conflicts and the high demand for arms, illicit firearms trafficking quickly grew as a market.¹⁴

⁸ Grant, "The Arms," ResearchGate.

⁹ UNODC, "History of Legitimate," United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

¹⁰ Baugh, "Proxy war," Britannica.

¹¹ Grant, "Merchants of Death," Origins Current Events in Historical Perspective

¹² Cox, "In a National," Los Angeles Times.

¹³ Imperial War Museums, "Timeline of 20th," Imperial War Museums.

¹⁴ Dyer, "The Illicit," Atlas Institute for International Affairs.

21st Century: 2000 - Present

Since the beginning of the 21st century, non-state actors, specifically militant groups, have risen to increasingly prominent roles around the world, gaining significant power in the regions that they occupy.¹⁵ These parties have contributed heavily to the growth of the international illicit arms trade, taking advantage of weak borders and strong regional influence to traffick illegal arms. These independent armed groups are most concentrated in Central America, Central and North Africa, and the Middle East, where a lack of security and strong borders has allowed these groups to easily arm themselves through illegal trades.¹⁶

Case Study: Syrian Civil War

Beginning in 2011 and 2012, the Syrian Civil War one of the largest armed conflicts of the 21st century, and a prime example of the dangers that the international sale of illicit firearms bring to global peacekeeping and civilian life. Illegally purchased weapons played a significant role in combat, allowing insurgent groups to arm themselves extensively at relatively low costs.¹⁷ These weapons were largely supplied from stockpiles in nearby countries such as Libya and Iran, however, both the government and the insurgent groups were funded extensively by foreign nations including the United States, Russia, China, Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar.¹⁸ as a result of this near-constant flow of illicit weapons into the hands of combatants on all sides of the war, fighting against the former Syrian government continued for nearly 14 years before ending when Bashar al-Assad was evacuated from the country and Damascus was captured by rebel groups.

The extreme length of the Syrian Civil War compared to other similar conflicts highlights how the illicit arms trafficking can extend conflicts far beyond their expected lifespan. Easy access to military-grade weapons intensified the violence that occurred during fighting, leading to mass civilian death and displacement.¹⁹ Ineffective enforcement of border security and international arms embargoes allowed illicit firearms to become a widespread commodity during the war, being wielded by dangerous factions and enabling acts of extreme violence against those in opposition to their beliefs.²⁰ Even now that the war is over, it is not unlikely that the high amount of illicit weapons now present in Syria will contribute to future regional instability and arms trafficking, illustrating the need for further regulation and stronger action to combat the international trafficking of illicit firearms.

¹⁵ DNI, Non-State Actors, [1-7].

¹⁶ UNODC, "Larger Scale," United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

¹⁷ Herbert, "Arms Trafficking," Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime.

¹⁸ Dick, "The Arms," Georgetown Journal of International Affairs.

¹⁹ USA for UNHCR, "Syria Refugee," USA for UNHCR.

²⁰ Goldbaum et al., "Firing Squads,"

Past International Involvement

The United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (PoA)

Since its establishment in 2001, the PoA has been one of the UN's most comprehensive initiatives to reduce the impacts of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). Member states are encouraged to adopt a range of measures, such as legislative reform, weapons tracking, stockpile security, and public awareness efforts.²¹ The implementation of these measures is monitored in large part by national reports submitted by member states, and the international community has gathered regularly to assess its effectiveness through Review Conferences (RevCon) and Biennial Meetings of States (BMS).²²

Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)

The ATT, established in 2013, was the first legally binding agreement to establish common standards for the international transfer of conventional weapons.²³ The treaty mandates that states maintain transparency on transfers of conventional weapons, require risk assessment before export, and prohibit diversion of arms.²⁴ As of October 2025, 117 countries have ratified this treaty.²⁵ Countries that have not ratified this treaty include much of Eastern Africa and the Middle East, as well as Russia and the United States.

The UN Security Council

The UNSC continues to tackle the issue of illicit firearms trafficking through various resolutions, which aim to prevent terrorist access to weapons²⁶ and call for better enforcement of laws and improved border control. The council has also applied arms embargoes in places of conflict to curb the illicit flow of weapons to militias and similar groups, which it typically monitors using Panels of Experts.²⁷ Despite these initiatives, enforcement and lack of political will remain a major challenge.

²¹ "The United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons." United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs.

²² "The United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons." United Nations Regional Center for Peace and Disarmament in Africa.

²³ Woolcott, Peter. "Arms Trade Treaty." Audiovisual Library of International Law.

²⁴ "Arms Trade Treaty Text." Arms Trade Treaty.

²⁵ "Arms Trade Treaty." Arms Trade Treaty.

²⁶ "Security Council Urges Greater Collective Effort to Prevent Terrorists from Acquiring Weapons, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2370 (2017)." United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases.

²⁷ "Groups and Panels." United Nations Security Council.

UN Regional Centres for Peace and Disarmament

The UN Regional Centres for Peace and Disarmament are three region-specific centres which support economic and social development through security and disarmament.²⁸ Located in Togo (UNREC), Nepal (UNRCPD) and Peru (UNLIREC) respectively, these centres work with member states in their specific areas to enhance global cooperation and disarmament.²⁹

UN SaferGuard Programme

In 2011, the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines (IATG) were developed as rules for adequate management of ammunition, and the UN SaferGuard Programme was developed as a way to monitor them.³⁰ By providing technical assistance and security, the program reduces the risk of catastrophic explosions and prevents poorly managed stockpiles from falling into the hands of illicit networks. It also has a quick response mechanism to provide aid and technical advice to countries in the aftermath of an explosion if necessary.³¹

Global Firearms Program (GFP)

The GFP works to assist states in creating criminal justice systems which are able to effectively respond to challenges surrounding illicit firearms trafficking, helping countries strengthen their laws and strengthen their borders.³² Additionally, the program supports the UN Firearms Protocol, which ensures firearms are properly registered to prevent diversion into illegal markets.³³

UN Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR)

The DDR works to combat illicit firearms trafficking through the collection and disposal of weapons, the discharge of active combatants, and the reintegration of ex-combatants into society. It also supports weapon management to prevent arms from being diverted into criminal networks, strengthening long-term peace and security.³⁴

²⁸ "Regional Disarmament." United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs.

²⁹ "About UNRCPD." United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific.

³⁰ "Ammunition." United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs.

³¹ "UN SaferGuard Quick Response Mechanism provides ammunition technical support to Equatorial Guinea after explosions." United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs.

³² "Global Firearms Programme." United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

³³ "The Firearms Protocol." United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

³⁴ "Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration." United Nations Peacekeeping.

Current Situation

At present, the proliferation of weapons that has occurred since the beginning of the Cold War shows no signs of stopping. The flow of illicit firearms continues to feed into conflict zones, terrorist organizations, insurgent groups, and criminal enterprises. These armed insurgent groups are better able to destabilize already crumbling regions of the world. Additionally, geopolitical rivalries between nations make international cooperation more difficult than ever.³⁵

Recently, nations that have been reeling from damage done by illicit firearms trafficking have been responsible for “mopping up the damage”.³⁶ A consistent issue is that citizens from non-weapons-producing countries have been responsible for damage done by foreign weapons transported illegally. These innocent civilians bear the brunt of the impact, rather than weapons-producing states that watch from the sidelines. These are the people who are facing the consequences. At present, these states have taken no serious steps to prevent unauthorized use. Many nations around the world openly condemn the use of these weapons, but cannot prevent the spread of violence.³⁷

With arms proliferation on the rise and no end in sight, the risk for arms trafficking continues to rise alongside it. According to Amnesty International, over 12 billion bullets are produced every year, which is “almost enough to kill everyone in the world twice.”³⁸ They claim that “this is the cost of an unregulated trade industry” when referring to the more than 500 people who die each day due to gun violence, much of it caused by illicit firearms trafficking.³⁹

Today, with more than 100 countries onboard the Arms Trade Treaty, there is hope for a world in which stricter gun control is a reality. However, with poor means of enforcement and a high total economic value of the global arms trade, it is more difficult than ever to completely eliminate human rights abuses. This agreement can have immense effects, but only if liability is imposed on nation-states that breach the contract.⁴⁰ It is up to both the state and businesses to ensure a safe workplace and respect human rights, yet they are currently not held liable for the damages and repercussions arising from their work.

³⁵ Dyer, "The Illicit," Atlas Institute for International Affairs.

³⁶ Seventy-seventh Session, 16th Meeting (AM), "Nations Flooded," United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases.

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Amnesty International, "ARMS CONTROL," Amnesty International

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Ibid

Possible Solutions and Ongoing Debates

Reinforcing International Treaties and Border Control

Addressing illicit arms trafficking may require stronger international regulations, more coordinated enforcement, and deeper cooperation between states. One possible approach is to reinforce international frameworks such as the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)⁴¹ and the UN Programme of Actions,⁴² which aim to tighten export controls and reduce the flow of weapons to non-state actors. In addition, closer cooperation across borders, including information sharing and joint efforts to map smuggling routes, could help slow the movement of illicit weapons.

Disrupting Dark Web Marketplaces

A growing challenge is the expansion of online and dark web arms markets, where unregulated platforms enable illegal sales. For instance, in a 2023 Europol-coordinated operation, law enforcement seized the “Monopoly Market,” a major dark web marketplace, and arrested 288 suspects linked to trafficking activities. Authorities also reported the seizure of 117 firearms along with various drugs and pills,⁴³ showing how online arms trading is often tied to broader criminal economies. These cases suggest that collaboration between governments and technology companies, including efforts to monitor and dismantle such platforms and to improve cybersecurity tools that trace digital transactions, may become increasingly important.

At the same time, the spread of 3D-printed firearms presents a new layer of risk.⁴⁴ Many of these weapons can be produced without serial numbers and are difficult to trace. Considering tighter rules on the sharing of firearm blueprints and investing in technologies that can detect 3D-printed components before they circulate could be an effective approach to this topic.

Cryptocurrency and Emerging Technology

Traditionally, illegal arms deals were done in cash. Today, many illicit transactions are carried out using cryptocurrency,⁴⁵ which can offer a degree of anonymity and reduce direct oversight from authorities. This shift has made digital financial tracing more complex and highlights the need for governments to adapt their investigative and regulatory strategies rather than relying only on older, cash-focused models.

⁴¹ Arms Trade," [Page 1-12]

⁴² "Final report of RevCon4," [Page 10-31]

⁴³ "288 dark," Europol

⁴⁴ Veilleux-Lepage, "Printing Terror," [Page 1-8]

⁴⁵ "288 dark," Europol

Alongside this, some governments, including the USA,⁴⁶ and agencies are exploring how artificial intelligence can support enforcement. AI systems are increasingly being tested or used to flag suspicious shipping patterns, analyze large volumes of digital evidence, and identify possible trafficking networks more quickly. While there are still technical, legal, and financial questions, and not every country has the same capacity to deploy these tools, continued development of AI-based monitoring and analysis is often viewed as an area with significant potential in countering illicit trafficking.

National Sovereignty and Domestic Politics

Even with these proposed measures, there are ongoing points of tension. Concerns about national sovereignty frequently arise when international bodies seek stronger arms controls, since some states resist what they view as external interference in their domestic policies. In addition, countries with major defense industries may be reluctant to accept strict limits on arms transfers, given the possible economic and diplomatic consequences.

Debates around civilian gun ownership also play a role. In countries where access to firearms is legally or constitutionally protected, efforts to tighten regulation can face strong opposition. In some regions, corruption within law enforcement or government structures further complicates enforcement, allowing illegal arms markets to continue operating despite formal restrictions.

Conclusion

There is no single solution to illicit arms trafficking. A balanced approach, considering all components including security needs, economic interests, technological capacity, and human rights, may be more realistic than any one policy alone. Continued international cooperation, responsible use of new technology, and political willingness to address both supply and demand could all play a meaningful role in reducing the impact of illicit arms markets.

⁴⁶ United States Government, "United States," Homeland Security

Bloc Positions

Global Regulation Bloc:

Countries in the Transparency Bloc include the United States of America,⁴⁷ Canada,⁴⁸ Japan,⁴⁹ the United Kingdom,⁵⁰ and other more developed countries are focused on the elimination of illicit firearms trafficking through higher security and tighter export control, and would ideally have transparency between nations regarding this issue. Countries involved with this bloc have strong positions on removing the trade as thoroughly as possible.

Protection of Sovereignty Bloc

The protection of sovereignty Bloc has similar ideals to that of the Transparency Bloc, while also wishing to preserve sovereignty within nations. Some members of this Bloc are Brazil, Mexico, and South Africa and these countries with high standards regarding international intervention. Members of this bloc may also have some economic ties to the issue, benefiting or relying on it, or in most cases, simply profiting off of the transport of illicit goods through a country, especially for the smaller players on the global stage. Additionally, members of this bloc may be cautious when it comes to interference from members within the global regulations bloc.

Conflict-Affected Bloc

Members of the conflict-affected bloc include states who are currently experiencing conflict such as Afghanistan, Nigeria, South Sudan, and others in a similar situation. Members of this bloc would be seeking aid from members of the Global Regulation bloc to help stop the flow of illicit firearms and resolve conflict in the area.

Strategic and Sovereignty Protecting Bloc

This bloc includes members such as China, Russia, Iran, and Venezuela and similar to the protection of sovereignty bloc, wish to not have any interference from other countries in their affairs and would prefer to solve the issue within their own country instead of with UN interference. These countries would advocate against international interference and against many of the other blocs.

⁴⁷ US Government, "Justice Department," Justice.gov.

⁴⁸ Government of Canada, "Former Bill," Public Safety Canada.

⁴⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Conventional Weapons," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

⁵⁰ European Commission, "EU action," European Commission.

Discussion Questions

1. Should foreign intervention be used as a tool to combat illicit arms trafficking?
2. To what extent should uninvolved nations concern themselves with arms trafficking issues in other countries?
3. Are countries serving as hubs for arms trafficking obligated to enact actions to prevent it?
4. How can international parties and organizations aid in preventing the international trade of illegal firearms?
5. Should states that are (or risk becoming) sources of illicit firearms production or export be subject to sanctions?
6. What are the primary contemporary pathways and supply chains for the trafficking of illicit firearms?
7. How can states address illicit firearms trafficking at the national level?
8. What impact does the governance of legal firearms (licensing, storage, and record-keeping) have on diversion and illicit trafficking?
9. How should states respond to “ghost guns,” 3D-printed components, and online/encrypted marketplaces without unduly restricting privacy or speech?
10. To what extent should extraterritorial jurisdiction over arms brokers, financiers, and logistics providers be expanded, and how should conflicts of law be managed?
11. How effective are the current measures, and under what conditions do they succeed or fail?

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