

OPEN-ENDED MEETING OF GOVERNMENTAL EXPERTS 9-13 MAY 2011
Summary Report: Plenary Session: Afternoon - 10 May 2011

This afternoon session of the MGE was exclusively on the topic of record-keeping. States shared their experience in record-keeping and were encouraged by the Chair to stress the challenges they face in creating, maintaining or archiving records.

The different types of record keeping

Information recorded

Most of the states have records of their military and police firearms (Trinidad and Tobago, Algeria, Guatemala, Republic of Congo, USA, Peru, and Pakistan).

In the Republic of Congo, firearms are recorded according to the serial number given by the manufacturer.

Guatemala described in detail its record-keeping system: imported firearms are recorded as well as manufactured firearms. Guatemala also records the personal information of the owner and any transfer of property. Regarding ammunition, Guatemala controls ammunition sellers who need to get authorisation from the government prior to selling.

In Iran, relevant governmental agencies keep records on all firearms transferred and manufactured.

The United States described their record system as a decentralised one. The US delegate emphasised the fact that there is no national record system; record-keeping is done by the private industry (manufacturers, sellers, dealers).

For the recording of civilian firearms, some states such as Trinidad and Tobago, and African member states of the Regional Centre on Small Arms (RECSA) covering the Great Lakes Region, the Horn of Africa and Bordering States oblige civilians to obtain a licence to import or use weapons.

Japan does not have regulations for civilian arms. There is, for the moment, no law covering the marking or record-keeping of these firearms.

In general, most states record the same important information: serial number, caliber, type of firearm and country of manufacture.

Hand written (manual) records and electronic records

Many states such as Trinidad and Tobago, the Republic of Congo, Bahamas, and Germany, are currently modernising their records from handwritten records to electronic records.

Algeria has manual and electronic records for the military and police firearms.

In the United States, private companies maintain both paper and electronic records for extra security. The government has electronic access to some of the records but the system is not nationally computerised.

In the last two months Australia has developed new electronic technology for databases that will be presented on Wednesday, 11th May.

Time limit of the records

The expert from Australia stressed the importance for states to keep records for an unlimited time. Indeed, if records are destroyed, firearms can still be used illegally afterwards and are not traced any more. Moreover, with electronic records, it is easily possible to keep records without financial burden.

Hungary, Guatemala and Algeria already have unlimited firearms records. Guatemala and Algeria also keep records of destroyed arms in order to have proof of their destruction.

In Algeria, civilian arms are recorded for 10 years by the manufacturer, and then the records are archived by the government. Algeria underlined the importance of conserving all information and stressed the issue of firearms trafficking and terrorism in its region.

In Germany, in the United States, as well as member states of RECSA in the Great Lakes Region, the Horn of Africa and Bordering States, records are kept for 30 years.

For Japan, there is no need to keep records once small arms are actually destroyed.

Challenges

Lack of resources and lack of technical capacities

The Bahamas, Republic of Congo, Trinidad and Tobago and Guatemala identified their primary concerns as the lack of resources and lack of technical capacities primarily to convert their recording system to an electronic database. They are faced with a lack of technical expertise, personnel and staff training to use the marking machines. France, and Trinidad and Tobago also stressed that lack of expertise often leads to incomplete marking and therefore ineffective tracing.

As such, these states acknowledge the need for international assistance and cooperation. Partnerships with regional organisations should also be strengthened.

Security and up to date of information

Canada stressed the importance of having strong project control for databases. First, to control who has access to the firearm records and secondly to prevent potential security breaches. RECSA presented its new software which is encrypted to protect data through a project funded by Japan through UNDP and the European Union.

Many states also emphasised the fact that it is difficult to keep up to date records as this requires a lot of work and technical expertise.

The Chair concluded the session by summarising the main issues expressed by states during the last two days. On the issue of ammunition, the Chair stated that he will report on ammunition even though the issue is not in the agenda because so many states have talked about it. This was in response to the United States' position that ammunition should not be mentioned in the final document.