**Forum:** The Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ)

**Issue #1:** Measures to address firearm accessibility and its impact on international security

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**Introduction**

More than 500 people die of gun violence every day (Amnesty International). Over 20,000 people died due to gun violence in 2022, excluding suicides. The rapidly growing accessibility to firearms has been a major concern for international security in recent years. Access to firearms comes from different situations or places, including legal purchases, inheritance, theft, etc. The availability of weapons has led to a surge of gun violence globally, more specifically in countries in which firearm ownership laws are looser. Gun violence is deemed a human rights issue, seeing as it violates the right to life, stated in the Universal Declaration. “ Everyone's right to life shall be protected by law. No one shall be deprived of his life intentionally save in the execution of a sentence of a court following his conviction of a crime for which the penalty is provided by law,” (Equality and Human Rights Commission). Although gun violence can affect anyone, it disproportionately affects marginalized communities, such as people of color and members of the LGBTQ+ community, adding another layer to this issue. All nations have the responsibility to promote and protect human rights to create a safe environment for the people in their community, especially those at a higher risk. By not taking the appropriate measures to address and control this issue, nations might breach their obligations under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

There are many different causes for the availability of guns, whether it is legally or illegally obtained; however, no matter where they come from, addressing firearm availability is important in maintaining in international security and peace. For example, when it comes to legally obtained guns, the easy availability of firearms can undermine the effectiveness of peacekeeping and stabilization efforts in conflict-affected countries. When firearms are readily available, it can be more difficult for peacekeepers to establish and maintain control over areas of operation (UN Press). When it comes to illegally obtained firearms, the illicit trade of guns is often linked to organized crime and terrorism and can additionally exacerbate violence by providing firearms to already armed groups (UNODC). Thus, in order to prevent the ongoing rise of gun violence, its supposed biggest attributing factor (fire availability) must be discussed and regulated. The solution to this multifaceted issue requires the compliance of all states and non-state actors and a diplomatic discussion of the root causes of this issue. Although the topic of firearm availability is controversial and there are multiple contrasting beliefs, nations must come together to prevent more senseless deaths caused by gun-violence to endure.

**Definition of Key Terms**

**International Security**

Collective measures employed by international organizations to ensure security and prevent conflict among their citizens.

**Threats to international security**

Gang violence, Terrorist attacks, Gun violence, Nuclear proliferation, Transnational organized crime.

**Small Arms**

Weapons designed for personal use. This includes rifles, pistols, and machine guns.

**Light Weapons**

Weapons designed for use by several people serving as a crew. This includes crew-served kinetic firearms, incendiary devices, or shoot explosive munitions.

**Illicit firearm trades**

Unlawful or unauthorized trafficking of firearms and weapons across national or international borders.

**Cross-border Firearm trafficking**

Sea trafficking in large quantities; Land trafficking in small quantities, usually through vehicles; Ant trafficking through small amounts

**Gun violence**

The use of firearms to purposefully harm individuals. Includes crimes committed with firearms such as; homicides, assaults, attacks, shootings, and gang violence.

**Sexual violence**

Non-consensual sexual contact or behavior perpetuated through physical or physiological violence or coercion.

**Perpetrators**

Individuals guilty of a crime, offense, or any form of harmful violence.

**Systematic Inequalities**

Biases towards certain groups generate disparities in regard to access to opportunities, resources, and power.

**Organized Criminal Groups**

A structured group of three or more persons with the aim of committing at least one serious crime such as cargo theft, fraud, robbery, kidnapping for ransom, etc.

**General Overview**

The issue of firearms and its impact on international security is an intricate and multiphased issue. Its increasing and rapid availability has implicated challenges in international security such as terrorism, organized crime and armed conflict. Firearm violence is a daily devastation affecting the lives of individuals throughout the world. According to a report by the World Health Organization (WHO), it is estimated that there were over 250,000 firearm-related deaths worldwide in 2016, and many more non-fatal injuries. The vast majority of these deaths and injuries occurred in low and middle-income countries. In recent years, the extensive use of weapons has become of emerging concern for the international communities and needs to be recognized and addressed to promote global safety and peace.

**Discriminatory Attacks and Marginalized Groups Affected**

Firearm accessibility fuels domestic violence. Men make up the majority of perpetrators and victims of gun violence; however, women are at a particular risk of firearm violence by an intimate partner. This availability to abusive partners threatens all victims of domestic violence, making it 5 times more likely that a woman will be killed by their partner. Gifford Law Center states that “Domestic violence assaults involving a gun are 12 times more likely to result in death than those involving other weapons or bodily force”. Extensive research demonstrates that strengthening firearm prohibition laws reduces intimate gun partner homicides by 16%. Notably, gun violence has also disproportionately affected racial and ethnic minorities and is extremely concentrated in communities with long histories of racial segregation and racial injustice backgrounds. 60% of firearm homicide victims in the United States are Black Americans, yet they account for less than 15% of the population (EFS GV). In 2020, 12,179 Black Americans and 7,286 White Americans died from gun violence. Despite making up only 4% of the population, young Hispanic Americans (ages 15 to 29) account for 8% of all gun homicide victims. This showcases the systematic inequalities behind firearm violence. Access to firearms in places with a high concentration of minorities is high. Whether that is from getting a hold of them legally or illegally, the Small Arms Survey estimates that of the one billion firearms in global circulation as of 2017, 85% are in civilian hands (Small Arms Survey).

**Illicit Firearm Trade**

Illicit firearm trade poses a significant threat to international security as it facilitates the flow of weapons to criminal organizations, terrorists groups, and other non-state actors. These weapons can be used to perpetrate violence, fuel conflict, and destabilize governments and societies, both domestically and internationally. Illicit firearm trade can occur through various channels including theft, corruption, or inadequate and insufficient regulations in the firearm industry. Additionally, countries that experience political instability are often more vulnerable to illicit firearm trade. This is because in countries with weak governance, corruption, or ongoing conflicts, the control of firearms can be compromised. There has been an ongoing debate as to if firearm availability causes an increase in illicit firearm trade. One on hand, some argue that easy access to legal firearms can contribute to the illicit trade in firearms. This is because criminals may be able to steal or purchase legal firearms and then sell or trade them illicitly. A study found that illegal firearm markets can be fueled by the diversion of legal firearms (Crime, Law and Social Change). On the other hand, others argue that stricter gun control measures can lead to a rise in the illicit trade in firearms, as criminal organizations seek to obtain firearms through illicit means. Moreover, a study found that stricter gun control measures in some countries have led to an increase in the use of illicit firearms by criminal organizations (Global Crime). Overall, the relationship between firearm availability and the illicit trade in firearms is complex and context-specific, making it difficult to pinpoint a cause. However, it is clear that both legal and illegal firearms can contribute to the illicit trade in firearms, and that comprehensive strategies to combat this problem must address both sources of firearms.

**Terrorism and Violence**

Firearms have the potential to be used in terrorist attacks, gang violence, and other forms of violence. Although firearms were used in fewer than 10% of terrorist attacks between 2002 and 2016, they accounted for about 55% of the fatalities (NCBI). There has also been found to be a positive correlation between country-level firearm availability and terrorism (SAGE). Being a young male, a member of a gang, or a drug dealer again indicates a higher tendency for involvement when using guns in criminal activity. Nearly one-fourth (23%) of all arrested people who owned a gun also admitted to using it in a criminal act. The percentage was higher for young males, coming in at 33%, and even higher for gang members and drug dealers, coming in at 50% and 42%, respectively. Regarding homicides in general, Harvard’s school of public health found there to be a positive correlation between gun prevalence in developed nations and suicide, homicide, and unintentional firearm death (Harvard). Additionally, whilst comparing gun laws, it was found that countries with stricter gun laws had lower rates of firearm-related deaths (BMJ). The study compared firearm death rates in the United States, where gun laws are relatively lax, with those in 21 other high-income countries, where gun laws are generally stricter.

**Technological Advancements**

Technological advancements present a significant danger to the regulation of firearms; however, they also allow for considerable advancements in firearm security. The Dark Web, an overlay network within the internet with limited accessibility, is utilized for both legal and illegal activities. Unfortunately, it serves as a facilitator for the distribution of illegal weapons that are already circulating in the black market, as well as a potential source for diverting legally-owned weapons. This phenomenon has experienced vast technological advancements over the years, leading to potential dangers regarding the regulation and security of firearms. The Dark Web hosts various online black markets that promote the sale of firearms, weapons, explosives, and prohibited digital materials. As a result, individuals have the opportunity to acquire firearms illegally and anonymously, posing a significant threat to public safety, particularly when individuals who are legally prohibited from owning firearms can still obtain them. Conversely, the Dark Web has also endorsed the development of new security measures for firearm use. For example, the use of blockchain technology can allow for the tracking of firearm ownership and transfer, making it more challenging for firearms to end up in the wrong hands. Furthermore, advancements in biometric technologies, such as fingerprint and facial recognition, have improved firearm security by ensuring that only authorized individuals can access and use firearms.

**Major Parties Involved and Their Views**

**United States of America**

The United States has a disproportionately large percentage of civilian-held firearms, accounting for 46 percent of the worldwide total firearm ownership. In almost all states, citizens solely need to pass a standard background check, and will then obtain the weapon. Although laws vary between each state, roughly one-third of American firearm owners purchase their weapons directly from private sellers, which is exempt from the federal law's requirement for background checks, meaning there are no security precautions taken. This poses a great threat to international security, as it was determined that over 44,000 people died due to gun violence in the United States last year.

**Yemen**

According to a Small Arms Survey, the estimated rate of civilian firearms holdings (firearms per 100 residents), is 52.8 in Yemen. Yemen comes second to the United States as the most heavily armed country in the world. The country has an immense gun culture, with all individuals taking pride in owning firearms. The spread of illegal weapons in Yemen has emerged as one of the main issues in the country.

**Japan**

Japan’s gun control laws are among the strictest in the world. Their Firearm and Sword Possession Control law states that “no one shall possess a fire-arm or fire-arms or a sword or swords.” There are over 10 different procedures that citizens must pass when looking to obtain a firearm. According to data from the Small Arms Survey, with only 0.3 guns per 100 people, Japan has the lowest rate of gun ownership per capita.

**Canada**

While Canada has much stronger gun laws in comparison to the United States, contrary to popular belief, Canadians can still own firearms, providing they have a proper license. Citizens must be over 18 years old to pass the Canadian firearms safety course, receive a proper background check, and obtain an official license. Canada is number six on the list of gun ownership rates, with 34.7 firearms per 100 people.

**Australia**

Following the devastating Port Arthur Massacre on April 28, 1996, in Australia, with the death of 35 people, the country immediately mobilized. Over the course of the next 12 days, the National Firearms Agreement (NFA) was passed. In this agreement, it is stated that semi-automatic rifles are banned, there will be a required waiting period and background check prior to purchasing a firearm, a requirement to demonstrate a “genuine reason” for owning a firearm (excluding self-defense), and further measures needed to be passed by any citizen wanting to obtain a gun.

**Timeline of Events**

| **Date** | **Description of event** |
| --- | --- |
| 9th century  | The use of gunpowder was first identified in China  |
| 1380 | First recorded use of firearms |
| 1400 | First traceable diversification of firearms in Europe. |
| 1494 | First tracked transportation of a firearm which was known as matchlock arquebus |
| 1791 | The Second Amendment to the United States Constitution is ratified, which guarantees the right of individuals to keep and bear arms. |
| 1925 | The Geneva Protocol is signed, which prohibits the use of chemical and biological weapons in warfare. |
| 2019 | The Christchurch mosque shootings in New Zealand result in the deaths of 51 people and prompt the country to enact significant changes to its firearm laws, including a ban on most semi-automatic firearms. |
| 2001 | The terrorist attack known as 9/11. Four coordinated suicide terrorist attacks were carried out by the militant Islamist extremist network, al-Qaeda, against the United States.  |
| 2015 | Terrorist attack by the Islamic group in Paris on November 13, with 130 homicides.  |
| 2020 | The COVID-19 pandemic lead to an increase in firearms sales in many countries, raising concerns about personal and civil safety |

**UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties, and Events**

The awareness of the issue of arms and light weapons, in the UN Security Council, has evolved significantly. This evolution has provoked an increase in the variety of United Nations operations, programmatic responses, and control frameworks regarding the regulations on the distribution of small arms.

* Security Council Resolution 2117 (2013) on Small Arms and Light Weapons
	+ The resolution focused on the illicit transfer, destabilizing accumulation, and misuse of small arms and light weapons. There were 14 votes in favor, none against, and Russia abstained.
* Resolution 2220 (2015)
	+ The resolution contained further provisions aimed at strengthening international cooperation, effective implementation of UN arms, and support to the Arms Trade Treaty
* Resolution “Silencing the guns in Africa”
	+ The effective implementation of relevant arms control instruments and regimes, in particular those related to small arms and light weapons, are referenced in several parts of the resolution, thus illustrating the criticality of tackling illicit arms to achieve a conflict-free Africa.
* Resolution 2616 (2021)
	+ focusing on the illicit transfer, destabilizing accumulation, and diversion of arms and related materials in violation of Council-mandated arms embargoes.
* Human rights council
	+ Addresses the impact of firearm transfer, possession, and acquisition of small arms on human rights on a regulatory basis

**Past action**

Unrelated to UN action, there have been many steps taken to further the protection of the masses related to the accessibility of firearms. These actions have been taken both at a national and international level. Some of the most notable ones include:

* The Nairobi Protocol:
	+ An agreement developed by the Regional Center on Small Arms and Light Weapons to control the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in East and Central Africa. The protocol aims to prevent illicit trade and the misuse of these weapons by strengthening national legal frameworks, improving border controls, and promoting transregional cooperation. The protocol includes provisions for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs. As well as the destruction of surplus weapons.
* The European Union’s Firearm Directive (Directive (EU) 2021/555):
	+ The Directive (EU) 2021/555 amended Directive 91/477/EEC to further tighten regulations on the acquisition and possession of firearms within the European Union. The amendments include stricter controls on “Category A” firearms, deeper background checks, better cooperation, and unique identifiers for all new firearms to improve tracing.
* The International Small Arms Control Standards (ISACS):
	+ The ISACS are voluntary and non-binding guidelines developed by the UN to provide practical guidance on small arms and light weapons control. These guidelines aim to promote better practices in small arms and light weapons control. As well as national and international efforts to prevent the illicit trade of said weapons. The ISACS covers a range of topics, including stockpile management, marking and tracing, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration.
* The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons:
	+ The convention mandates a complete prohibition on all international transfers of small arms within the subregion, except when an exception has been granted by the ECOWAS secretariat. It establishes regulations for the manufacturing of SALW and introduces measures to facilitate transparency and sharing of information between member states. Additionally, the convention covers aspects such as civilian possession, stockpile security, marking, tracing, and brokering. Furthermore, the convention includes a provision for a register of arms set aside for use in peacekeeping operations and emphasizes the importance of engaging in dialogue with manufacturers and international suppliers.
* The National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) in the United States:
	+ The NICS is a system run by the FBI in the United States, allowing licensed firearm dealers to conduct instant background checks on potential customers. The system checks a variety of databases for information that could prohibit an individual from purchasing a firearm. Since its creation, the system has prevented the sale of firearms to over 1.5 million disqualified individuals.
	+ The Organization of American States (OAS) Model Regulations for the Control of the Firearms Trade:
	+ The Inter-American Convention is an international agreement implemented to address the issue of illegal production and trafficking of firearms in the Americas. Its objective is to regulate the manufacturing, importation, exportation, and transfer of firearms through established and concrete measures. Additionally, the convention has also promoted cooperation among member states to combat the unlawful trade of firearms.

**Possible Solutions**

**Enforcing Gun Control**

One of the most widely used actions taken by countries to limit firearm accessibility is gun control. Implementing specific and intricate steps needed to take before purchasing firearms, restricts the number of people who are able to and desire to access weaponry. Often, background checks are required, but taking extra measures such as psychological checks, family interviews, firearm classes, and legal age will lower the accessibility of obtaining firearms. Furthermore, providing registration for all firearms purchased would be extremely important, allowing the government to keep track of all legal weapons.

**Reducing the Existing Stockpile**

According to the Small Arms Survey, there are at least 875 million guns globally, with only 25% of these firearms in possession of the military, army, police, or government. It is of the utmost importance to reduce both the civilian and state stockpile. It is heavily advised that governments should suppress and eliminate their surplus stockpiles. Civilian stockpile on the other hand needs to be addressed in other ways, such as implementing programs that encourage civilians to exchange their firearms for money, food, household goods, etc. Moreover, obligatory weapons collection plans can also be put in place.

**Eliminating Illegal Markets**

All firearms are manufactured in officially authorized factories by a national government. The stock of small arms that are illegal is actually a stock of weapons that were formally legal. These legal weapons enter the possibility of becoming illegal once the product exits the manufacturer. Factories often sell firearms to government agencies and gun dealers legally, although due to inadequate security and storage, these weapons are often stolen, thus providing illegal guns to the population. Seeing as though the illegal arms market is fueled by the legal arms market, the best way of tackling this issue is reducing the production in the latter. By controlling and monitoring the production of legal firearms, where they are placed once leaving factories, and how they are stored, legal weapons can be prevented from crossing the line into the illegal domain.

**Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)**

This issue relates to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, which aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels. Global peace is being threatened by the continuous trafficking and misuse of weapons, with terrorism and attacks being the most common forms of misuse. By eradicating and addressing the issue of firearm accessibility, the international community could fulfill SDG 16 and achieve peace, justice, and strong institutions. Currently, accessibility to firearms is not properly regulated or addressed, leading to the widespread availability and distribution of illicit arms, which in turn have contributed significantly to violence and related deaths worldwide.

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**Appendix**

1. Introduction to the United nations congress on crime prevention and criminal justice
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