

REPORTING TO THE UNITED NATIONS REGISTER OF CONVENTIONAL ARMS

PAUL HOLTOM, LUCIE BÉRAUD-SUDREAU AND HENNING WEBER*

The key international mechanism for states to report on international arms transfers is the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA; see box 1). UNROCA was established to build confidence and cooperation between states. The information provided by states to UNROCA is used in analyses of states' intentions and capabilities and in bilateral or regional consultations to help avoid misinterpretations, miscalculations and the exaggeration of threats that can influence arms races and armed conflicts. Information reported to UNROCA is made publicly available. Therefore parliamentarians and interested citizens can use UNROCA to help monitor their government's compliance with its national and international legal obligations regarding the prevention of conflict, human rights violations and, to a degree, illicit arms transfers.

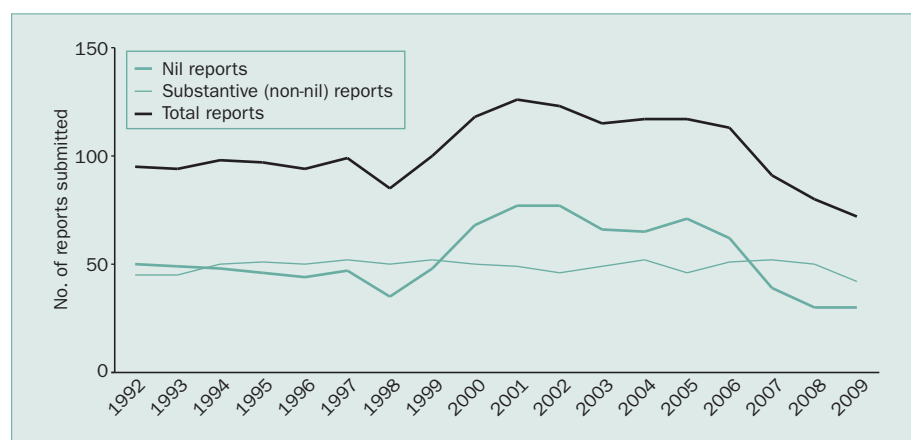


Figure 1. Number of states reporting to UNROCA, 1992–2009

UNROCA has played a crucial role in promoting the norm of transparency in international arms transfers since the end of the cold war. In recent years there has been a dramatic decline in levels of reporting to UNROCA (see figure 1). This Fact Sheet provides information on the levels of reporting to UNROCA for the years 1992–2009, including regional trends, reasons for low levels of reporting and efforts to improve reporting.

* This Fact Sheet is part of a study, funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to examine existing reporting mechanisms on international arms transfers and export control systems to inform discussions on the implementation of effective systems of reporting and monitoring under an arms trade treaty.

KEY FACTS

- Each year all United Nations member states are requested to report their imports and exports of major conventional weapons to the UN Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA).
- UNROCA has played a crucial role in promoting the norm of transparency in international arms transfers.
- Between 1992 and 2009, 174 states reported to UNROCA at least once, and 37 states reported every year.
- Eighty-eight states have submitted only ‘nil reports’—reporting that they neither imported nor exported arms during the year.
- Twenty-two states have never submitted a report.
- Since 2003, 73 states have submitted information on their international transfers of small arms and light weapons.
- Participation has fallen from a high of 126 states reporting for 2001 to a low of 72 states reporting for 2009.
- Rates of reporting vary significantly between regions. Europe, Asia and Oceania, and the Americas have the highest response rates, and Africa and the Middle East the lowest.
- Reasons for non-reporting relate to national security concerns, political will, and administrative capacity

**Box 1. The United Nations Register of Conventional Arms**

The United Nations General Assembly established UNROCA in December 1991 to ‘enhance confidence, promote stability, help States to exercise restraint, ease tensions and strengthen regional and international peace and security’ and ‘to prevent the excessive and destabilizing accumulation of arms . . . in order to promote stability and strengthen regional or international peace and security’.^a

States are requested to report annually on the import and export of seven categories of major conventional weapons:

- battle tanks;
- armoured combat vehicles;
- large-calibre artillery;
- combat aircraft;
- attack helicopters;
- warships; and
- missiles and missile launchers.

States are requested to provide information on quantity and type of weapons, and exporting or importing state. They are invited to provide a description of the item and any additional comments on the transfer. States are also invited to provide background information on military holdings, procurement from national production and, since 2003, international transfers of small arms and light weapons.

^a UN General Assembly Resolution 46/36L, 6 Dec. 1991.

RATES OF REPORTING TO UNROCA

Between 1992 and 2009, 174 states reported to UNROCA at least once, while 22 UN member states have never submitted a report (see table 1).¹

The reporting rate for the period 1992–2009 was 54 per cent, but this has varied from year to year (see figure 1). During the 1990s, fewer than 100 states reported each year to UNROCA. In contrast, the number of states reporting for the years 2000–2006 never dropped below 100. The highest level of participation was for 2001, with 126 states submitting reports. However, the level of reporting then dropped, and participation for 2009 was the lowest in UNROCA’s history: just 72 UN member states (37 per cent) submitted reports.

Thirty-seven UN member states have reported for each year in the period 1992–2009, all but two of which regularly reported actual imports or exports of arms. These states account for the majority of reports containing information on actual transfers of conventional arms submitted to UNROCA.

Noteably, six states that had reported for each of the years 1992–2007 did not report for 2008 or 2009: the Czech Republic, France, Greece, Iceland, Pakistan and Turkey.

Nil reports

States that have neither imported nor exported any item covered by UNROCA are encouraged to submit a ‘nil report’, in order to demonstrate commitment to transparency and confidence building in armaments. Of the 174 states that have reported to UNROCA, 88 have submitted only nil reports, and 52 per cent of all reports have been nil reports (see table 1). There is a positive cor-

¹ Unless otherwise stated, years refer to the year of the arms transfers reported on, not the year of the report’s submission.



Table 1. Reporting to UNROCA, by region, 1992–2009

Figures are numbers of states reporting and include states that no longer exist and states that were not United Nations members when reporting.

Region	UN member states	States reporting	Non-reporting states	States reporting 1–9 times	States reporting every year	Annual average reporting level (%)	States submitting only nil reports	Nil reports as share of total reports (%)
Africa	52	38	14	33	0	20	32	88
Americas	35	35	0	18	5	56	23	67
Asia and Oceania ^a	45	43	2	18	6	63	23	58
Europe ^a	50	50	0	5	25	90	7	34
Middle East	14	8	6	5	1	20	3	31
Total	196^b	174	22	79	37	54	88	52

^a These totals include reports submitted by the Cook Islands, the Czech Republic, the Holy See, Kiribati, Slovakia and Switzerland for years in which they were not members of the UN and Yugoslavia, which no longer exists.

^b The Cook Islands, the Holy See and Niue, which are included in this total, are not full members of the UN.

Source: UNROCA database, <http://disarmament.un.org/un_register.nsf>.

relation between the number of nil reports submitted and overall level of participation in UNROCA (see figure 1). This correlation is also evident for regional participation except Europe, where only 7 of the region's 50 states have submitted nil reports.

Nil reports are not fully reliable. Every year there are a number of cases in which a state that has submitted a nil report is identified as being involved in a transfer (either as an importer or an exporter) in the report of another state. There are also cases of states that have regularly submitted nil reports ceasing to report for certain years while UNROCA reports from other states reveal transfers to the now non-reporting state (see below for examples).

REGIONAL TRENDS

Africa

For the years 1992–2009, 38 of the 52 states in Africa submitted at least one report to UNROCA; 88 per cent of reports were nil reports (see figure 2).

In Africa, small arms and light weapons (SALW) are considered to have a significant role in destabilization and conflicts. The low-level of substantive reports to UNROCA from African states has been attributed to the lack of a requirement to reporting transfers of SALW (see box 2).

Reports to UNROCA (from both African and non-African states) indicate that African countries are involved in transfers of major conventional weapons in UNROCA's seven categories. For 2007–2009, reports to UNROCA identified 27 African states as recipients of major conventional

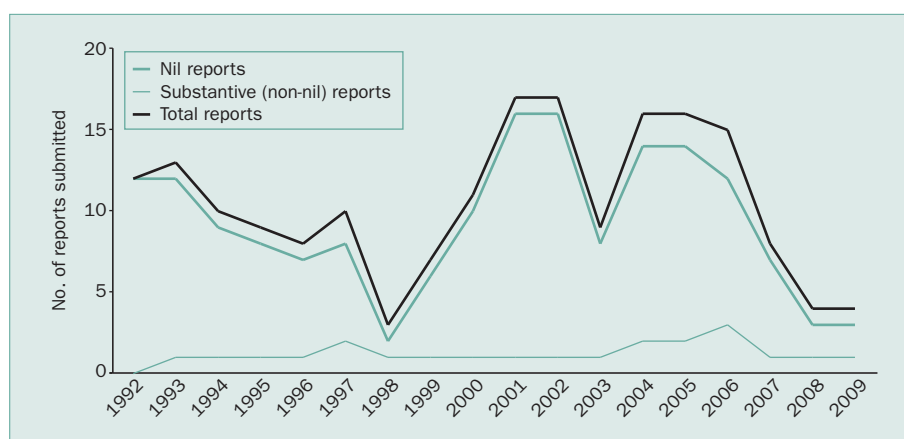


Figure 2. Reporting to UNROCA by states in Africa, 1992–2009

Box 2. Reasons for non-reporting to UNROCA

The reasons most frequently cited by government experts to explain non-reporting to UNROCA relate to national security concerns and conflict, political will, and administrative capacity.^a The relevance of the seven UNROCA categories has also been given as a reason for non-reporting by states in Africa, the Americas and Middle East. The lack of a requirement for reporting SALW transfers has been identified as central to claims that UNROCA has limited relevance for the security concerns of sub-Saharan Africa, where SALW are considered to have a significant role in destabilization and conflicts (see box 4).^b Some states in the Middle East have linked their non-participation in UNROCA with the register's omission of weapons of mass destruction.^c These calls are clearly linked to Israel's possession of nuclear weapons.

The number of nil reports has declined alongside the total decline in reporting. While it could not explain the decline, the 2009 report of Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on the continuing operation and further development of UNROCA noted that 'outreach, updating national points of contact and follow-up by the Office for Disarmament Affairs are essential to ensuring that States are both aware of the possibilities of submission of "nil" returns' . . . and that such reports are equally important in terms of achieving the universal participation in the Register'.^d

^a United Nations, General Assembly, Report on the continuing operation of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and its further development, A/52/316, 29 Aug. 1997, para. 17; and United Nations, General Assembly, Continuing operation of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and its further development, A/64/296, 14 Aug. 2009, para 38.

^b United Nations, General Assembly, Continuing operation of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and its further development, A/58/274, 13 Aug. 2003, para. 63; United Nations, General Assembly, Continuing operation of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and its further development, A/61/261, 15 Aug. 2006, para. 51; and United Nations, Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), 'Regional workshop for Western African States on Transparency in Armaments', UNODA Update, Aug. 2009, <<http://www.un.org/disarmament/HomePage/ODAPublications/ODAUpdate/2009/Aug/index.html#5L>>.

^c Deen, T., 'Arab nations insist on WMDs in UN Arms Register', Inter Press Service, 4 Nov. 2008; and United Nations, General Assembly, Views received from governments in accordance with paragraph 7 (a) of General Assembly resolution 61/77, 14 July 2008, annex to A/63/120, p. 137.

^d United Nations, A/64/296 (note a).

weapons. The only African state to provide information to UNROCA on its imports for these years was South Africa. While 12 African states reported to UNROCA at least four times for 2000–2009, 8 of these—Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, Niger, Senegal and Tanzania—chose not to submit a report for years in which other states have reported exports to them. Four states that submitted nil reports for these years were identified as importers in reports of other states—Djibouti, Kenya, Niger and Zambia.

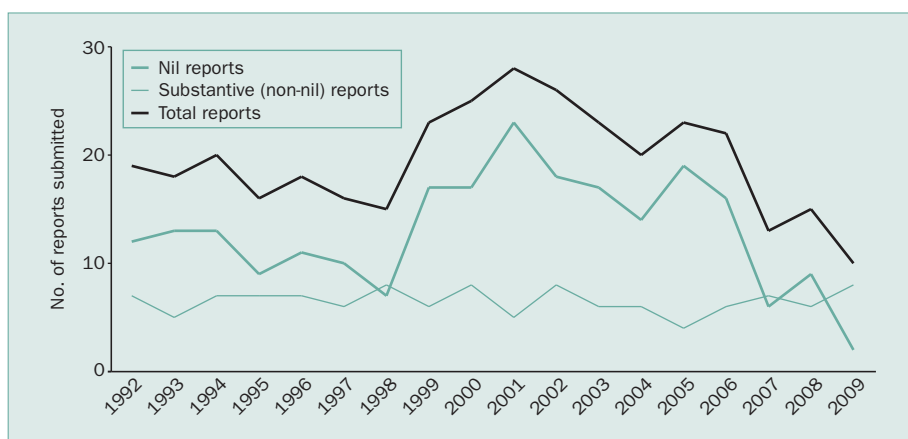


Figure 3. Reporting to UNROCA by states in the Americas, 1992–2009

The Americas

For the years 1992–2009, all 35 states in the Americas submitted at least one report to UNROCA; 67 per cent of reports were nil reports (see figure 3).

The UN General Assembly resolution establishing UNROCA also called for the establishment of regional registers. The Americas is the only region to have responded, with the adoption of the 1999 Inter-American Convention on Transparency in Conventional Weapons Acquisition (see box 3). States parties to the Convention that regularly report to UNROCA also regularly report under the Convention. However, Guatemala, El Salvador and Paraguay stopped reporting to

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Box 3. The Inter-American Convention on Transparency in Conventional Weapons Acquisition

The Inter-American Convention on Transparency in Conventional Weapons Acquisition was adopted in 1999 and entered into force in 2002. The Convention draws heavily on UNROCA: it covers the same seven categories and the reports (which are submitted to the Organization of American States, OAS) include the same types of information on quantity, type, exporting or importing state and additional information. However, in addition to imports, states are also required to report acquisitions from national production, and all acquisitions must be reported ‘no later than 90 days after incorporation . . . of the weapons into the inventory of the armed forces’.^a

Thirteen states have ratified the Convention, and nine states have provided an annual report on acquisitions and exports at least once (including the Bahamas, which is not a party to the Convention). However, only two states—Brazil and Chile—have submitted information on acquisitions within the 90-day deadline.

Eight OAS member states provided their UNROCA reports for 2009 to the OAS, including two—Mexico and the USA—that are not party to the Convention. In 2010 the OAS Secretariat for Multidimensional Security announced that it was seeking enhanced cooperation with the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), which administers UNROCA, to strengthen links between the two transparency instruments.^b This should help to enable reporting to both mechanisms and could offer a model for other regional organizations interested in promoting transparency in armaments.

^a On the Convention and the national reports see the website of the OAS Committee on Hemispheric Security, <<http://www.oas.org/csh/english/conventionalweapons.asp>>.

^b Organization of American States, Committee on Hemispheric Security, ‘Presentation by the Secretariat for Multidimensional Security on steps taken to collaborate with the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs to strengthen the implementation of the Inter-American Convention on Transparency in Conventional Weapons Acquisitions (6 April 2010)’, Doc. OEA/Ser.G CP/CSH-1204/10, 8 Apr. 2010.

UNROCA after they began reporting to the Convention. Guatemala submitted nil reports every year for the years 1996–2007, Paraguay for 1999–2006 and El Salvador for 2003, 2006 and 2007.

Asia and Oceania

For the years 1992–2009, 43 of the 45 states in Asia and Oceania submitted at least one report to UNROCA; 58 per cent of reports were nil reports (see figure 4).

The member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have reiterated their commitment to improve regional transparency through UNROCA on several occasions. Due to expressions of commitment to UNROCA, the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs has targeted outreach events at ASEAN states; it has held an outreach event in South East Asia on average every 2–3 years (see box 4). However, these focused outreach efforts have not prevented a decline in reporting to UNROCA.

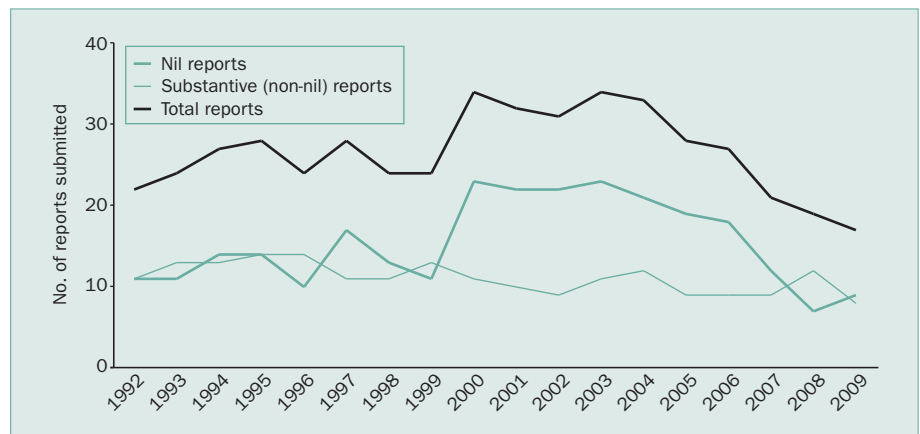


Figure 4. Reporting to UNROCA by states in Asia and Oceania, 1992–2009

Europe

For the years 1992–2009, all 50 states in Europe submitted at least one report to UNROCA; 34 per cent of reports were nil reports (see figure 5).

Box 4. Efforts to promote UNROCA

The UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) promoted UNROCA in 20 outreach workshops and events in Africa (6 events), Asia and Oceania (8 events), the Americas (4 events), Europe (1 event) and the Middle East (1 event) between 1993 and 2010.^a The UNODA has directed particular attention to western and eastern Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and South East Asia. The main goals of the outreach workshops and events are (a) to promote awareness of UNROCA, (b) to stimulate reporting by either maintaining reporting levels for a particular region or encouraging states to report, (c) to provide states with an opportunity for feedback on the operation of UNROCA and (d) to collect suggestions for further development from states that might not participate in the Group of Government Experts (GGE) reports.^b

These outreach efforts do not seem to have had a significant impact on levels of reporting. For example, while six events were held in Asia and Oceania between 2000 and 2010, the number of reports from states in the region fell from 34 for 2000 to 17 for 2009 (see figure 4). However, the feedback from outreach provides useful input for deliberations by the GGEs on the reasons for non-reporting and discussions on scope with a view to increasing reporting levels.^c For example, feedback from workshops in sub-Saharan Africa suggests that non-reporting can be explained by tensions within a subregion; bureaucratic difficulties in submitting reports; and concerns over national security related to transparency measures. Whereas participants in workshops in Africa and the Americas have expressed support for the expansion of UNROCA to include reporting on transfers of small arms and light weapons, participants in workshops in South East Asia have been less likely to believe that the expansion of the scope of UNROCA will increase its relevance for states.^d

^a United Nations, Office for Disarmament Affairs, Email to the author, 19 Apr. 2011.

^b United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), *Assessing the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms*, UNODA Occasional Papers no. 16, Apr. 2009, pp. 34–35.

^c United Nations, General Assembly, Continuing operation of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and its further development, A/58/274, 13 Aug. 2003, para. 52.

^d United Nations (note b), paras 64, 65.

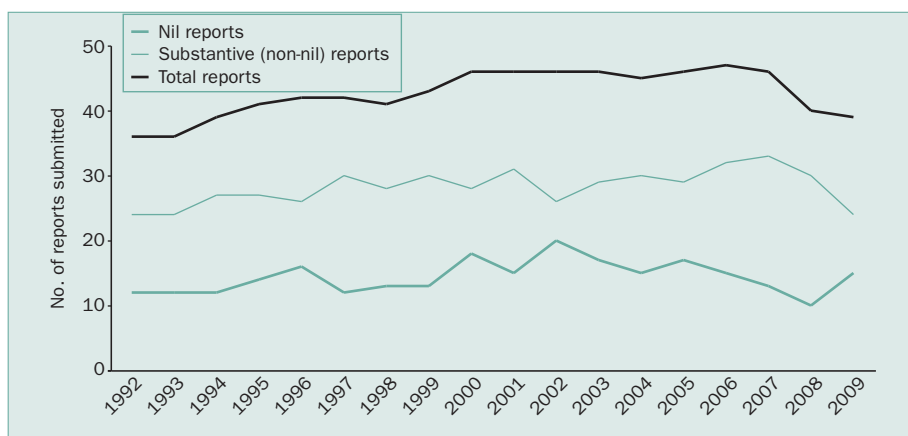


Figure 5. Reporting to UNROCA by states in Europe, 1992–2009

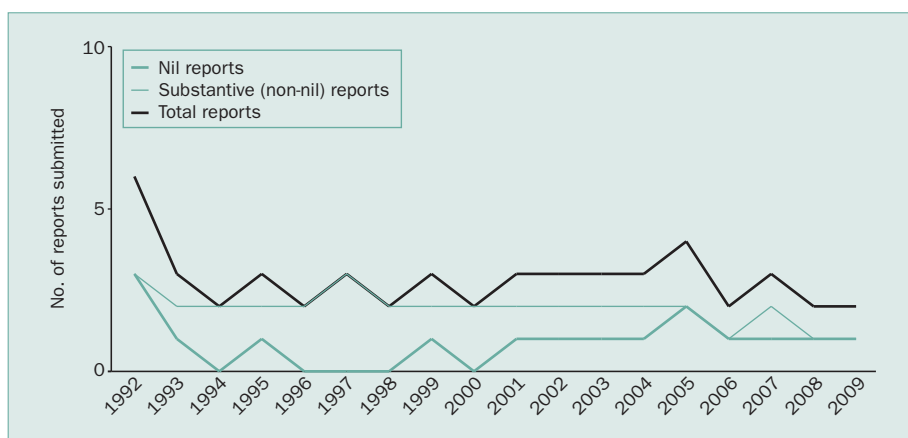


Figure 6. Reporting to UNROCA by states in the Middle East, 1992–2009

Europe's high rate of reporting on arms acquisitions and transfers is linked in large part to its well-developed transparency instruments. It is the only region in which nil reporting levels have no discernible impact on the overall level of reporting to UNROCA.

The relatively low level of interstate tensions in Europe is another factor that helps facilitate reporting. In the South Caucasus, a region of high interstate tensions, the picture is more complex. Armenia and Azerbaijan have a good record of reporting, despite their dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh: Armenia has reported to UNROCA 17 times and Azerbaijan 12 times. In contrast, Georgia, which had reported for all but one of the years 1992–2007, stopped reporting following its 2008 conflict with Russia.



The Middle East

For the years 1992–2009, 8 of the 14 states in the Middle East submitted at least one report to UNROCA; 31 per cent of reports were nil reports (see figure 6).

Many states in the Middle East believe that UNROCA should cover weapons of mass destruction (WMD; see box 2). While some use this as justification for non-participation, several others have reported to UNROCA. Iran, which reported six times in the 1990s, included with its submissions calls for reporting on WMD to UNROCA. Lebanon, which has reported to UNROCA 10 times, also called for WMD to be included in the scope of UNROCA.

REPORTING OF INTERNATIONAL TRANSFERS OF SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

Since 2003, 73 states have responded to the invitation to submit background information on international transfers of SALW (see box 5). Following the introduction of a standardized reporting template for SALW, the annual average level of reporting for the years 2006–2009 was 22 per cent of UN

Box 5. Including transfers of small arms and light weapons in reports to UNROCA

In 2003 the UN General Assembly invited states to submit background information on international transfers of SALW, and in 2006 it invited states to provide their background information on international transfers of SALW on a standardized reporting form.^a These changes resulted from recommendations made by the 2003 and 2006 Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on UNROCA. The 2009 GGE dedicated a great deal of its limited time to including an eighth category in UNROCA for reporting on SALW transfers.^b However, consensus was not achieved on this issue. The only substantive recommendation in the GGE's report related to seeking the views of UN member states on reporting SALW.^c

In January 2010, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution asking states to submit their views to the UN Secretary-General on the continuing operation of UNROCA and the possible inclusion of SALW as a separate reporting category.^d Seven states submitted views during 2010—Colombia, Israel, Japan, Mauritius, Mexico, Singapore and Switzerland.^e Colombia, Japan, Mauritius, Mexico and Switzerland expressed support for the inclusion of SALW as an UNROCA category to better reflect security concerns of particular regions and increase reporting levels. Singapore opposed the introduction of a category for reporting SALW transfers, expressing concern that this category would be too onerous a burden for states and would have a negative effect on state participation in UNROCA.

In March 2011 the US ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament, Laura Kennedy, expressed her disappointment at the fact that one member of the GGE blocked the expansion of UNROCA to include a category for reporting SALW transfers, lamenting this 'significant missed opportunity to improve the effectiveness of the UN Register'.^f She urged all UN members to provide their views on the issue of including SALW in UNROCA. It is therefore envisaged that more states will submit their views on this issue when reporting during 2011. These views, along with data on levels of reporting, will be important for reconsidering the issue of reporting on SALW during the next GGE, which is due to convene in 2012. During February–April 2011 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute distributed a questionnaire seeking views from states on the functioning of UNROCA, with 25 states responding by 9 May 2011. Twenty of the 25 states that replied were in favour of the inclusion of an additional category for reporting international transfers of SALW and 5 were opposed.

^a UN General Assembly Resolution 58/54, 8 Dec. 2003; and UN General Assembly Resolution 61/77, 6 Dec. 2006.

^b United Nations, General Assembly, Continuing operation of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and its further development, A/64/296, 14 Aug. 2009, para. 51.

^c United Nations (note b), para. 75; and Holtom, P., *Transparency in Transfers of Small Arms and Light Weapons: Reports to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, 2003–2006*, SIPRI Policy Paper no. 22 (SIPRI: Stockholm, July 2008).

^d UN General Assembly Resolution 64/54, 2 Dec. 2010.

^e United Nations, General Assembly, 'United Nations Register of Conventional Arms', Report of the Secretary-General, A/65/133, 15 Jul. 2010; and United Nations, General Assembly, 'UN Register of Conventional Arms', Report of the Secretary-General, A/65/133/Add.1, 15 Sep. 2010.

^f 'Ambassador Laura Kennedy on Transparency in Armaments', Conference on Disarmament, Geneva, Switzerland, 17 Mar. 2011, <<http://geneva.usmission.gov/2011/03/17/ambassador-kennedy-transparency-armaments/>>.

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**STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL
PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE**

Signalistgatan 9
SE-169 70 Solna, Sweden
Telephone: +46 8 655 97 00
Fax: +46 8 655 97 33
Email: sipri@sipri.org
Internet: www.sipri.org

Table 2. Reporting to UNROCA of background information on transfers of small arms and light weapons, 2003–2009

Years are years reported on. Figures are numbers of reports submitted. Figures in brackets are numbers of nil reports.

Region	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	States reporting, 2003–2009
Africa	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	4 (3)	3 (3)	1 (1)	1 (1)	6 (5)
Americas	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	8 (1)	6 (2)	8 (1)	7 (2)	15 (5)
Asia and Oceania	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	4 (1)	7 (1)	8 (0)	4 (0)	11 (2)
Europe	5 (0)	5 (0)	3 (0)	19 (1)	31 (3)	29 (2)	30 (2)	40 (5)
Middle East	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)
Total reports on SALW	5 (0)	5 (0)	3 (0)	35 (6)	47 (9)	47 (5)	43 (6)	73 (18)
Total reports to UNROCA	115	117	117	113	91	80	72	148

Source: UNROCA database, <http://disarmament.un.org/un_register.nsf>.

member states. Although the level of participation dropped from 47 states for 2007 and 2008 to 43 states for 2009, more than 50 per cent of states reporting to UNROCA for these years provided background information on SALW transfers.

The regional pattern for providing background information on SALW transfers is similar to that for reporting to UNROCA's seven categories: levels of participation by states in the Americas, Asia and Oceania, and Europe are higher than those of Africa and the Middle East (see table 2). Seventeen states that have submitted only nil reports to UNROCA's seven categories have provided background information on international transfers of SALW, including nine that have provided nil reports for SALW transfers.

CONCLUSIONS

At the turn of the millennium, the high levels of reporting to UNROCA inspired hopes that universal participation could be achieved. Unfortunately, reporting levels have declined dramatically in recent years, to reach the lowest ever level for 2009. While much of the analysis of the decline in reporting has rightly focused on the decline in the submission of nil reports, several states that had regularly reported on actual transfers have stopped reporting in recent years. The reasons behind this downward trend are not fully understood. Although a number of states in regions with low levels of reporting have linked their non-reporting to UNROCA with opposition to its current scope, it appears that broader political, security and state capacity concerns are the main reasons for non-reporting. Addressing these issues will require more than adjusting the coverage of UNROCA.