DISEC

Topics

Topic A: Illicit trade of small arms and light weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean

Topic B: Preventing the use of chemical and biological weapons by state and nonstate actors

Welcoming to the Committee

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Dear delegates,

It is with great pleasure that we welcome you to MMUN XVI. As your chair, we are honored to moderate over the DISEC committee and look forward to the rigorous debate ahead.

The coming days offer a premier platform to demonstrate your diplomatic prowess. You will be challenged to synthesize complex information, practice persuasive public speaking, and navigate the intricacies of international security.

Success in this committee relies heavily on the spirit of cooperation. We invite you to use your unique talents to propose innovative solutions to global challenges. Above all, we strive to maintain a professional yet approachable atmosphere where every delegate feels empowered to contribute and improve.

We are fully committed to supporting you throughout this conference. Should you require any clarification on the Academic Guide or committee procedures, we remain at your disposal. We wish for insightful and rewarding experiences.

Juan Sebastián Barragán & Pablo Sierra

Topic A: Illicit trade of small arms and light weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean

1. Introduction

The illicit trade of small arms and light weapons (SALW) poses a significant threat to peace, security, and development in Latin America and the Caribbean. The widespread availability of illegally trafficked firearms fuels organized crime, gang violence, and insecurity, contributing to some of the highest homicide rates globally. Weak border controls, limited regulatory frameworks, and transnational criminal networks enable the continued circulation of these weapons across the region.

This persistent flow of illicit arms undermines governance, destabilizes communities, and disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, including women and children. Addressing this challenge requires strengthened regional cooperation, effective implementation of international frameworks, and comprehensive strategies that combine arms control, law enforcement, and development initiatives.

2. Definition of ilicit trade of arms

The illicit trade of arms refers to the illegal manufacture, transfer, acquisition, stockpiling, and circulation of firearms, ammunition, and related materials in violation of national laws and international agreements. It includes the diversion of weapons from legal markets to unauthorized users and cross-border trafficking facilitated by transnational criminal networks, corruption, and weak regulatory frameworks.
This illicit trade fuels armed violence, organized crime, and insecurity, undermining governance, development, and the rule of law, particularly in regions affected by high levels of violence.

Small arms are handheld, portable firearms designed for individual use. They include, but are not limited to, revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, submachine guns, and light machine guns. Due to their portability, ease of concealment, and durability, small arms are widely used by civilians, law enforcement, armed forces, and non-state actors, and are frequently involved in illicit trafficking and armed violence.

Light weapons are portable weapons designed for use by several individuals working as a crew. They include heavy machine guns, hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft and anti-tank systems, recoilless rifles, and mortars of less than 100 mm calibre.

Historical context

The global effort to address the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons (SALW) has its roots in growing international concern during the late 20th century about the role these weapons played in armed violence, crime, and instability. In 2001, the United Nations convened the **UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects**, which marked a milestone in multilateral action against the proliferation of these weapons. Delegates from around the world agreed that the widespread circulation of SALW had contributed to pervasive insecurity, fuelling not only armed conflicts but also criminal violence and undermining human security globally.

From this conference emerged the **Programme of Action (PoA) to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects**, adopted by the UN in 2001. The PoA established a comprehensive framework of political commitments for strengthening national controls, improving import/export regulations, enhancing stockpile management, and promoting international cooperation to tackle illicit arms flows.

In parallel, in 2001 the **Protocol Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition** — known as the **Firearms Protocol** — was negotiated as part of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. It entered into force in 2005 and remains the only legally binding global instrument specifically targeting illicit firearms manufacturing and trafficking.

Latin America and the Caribbean have been particularly affected by the illicit SALW trade due to a combination of historical armed conflicts, widespread inequality, and powerful transnational organized crime networks linked to drug trafficking. The availability of illicit weapons has amplified rates of homicide and gang-related violence across the region — dynamics that were highlighted in global policy debates as early as the 2000s.

Since the early 2000s, the **United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNLIREC)** has played a key role in assisting states in implementing PoA commitments and strengthening regional cooperation. This includes supporting improved legal frameworks, training customs and law enforcement officials, and advancing traceability systems for weapons — essential measures given the transnational nature of arms trafficking.

At the multilateral level, annual **UN General Assembly resolutions** titled "The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects" have reinforced political commitment to the PoA and expanded cooperation among states, including many from Latin America and the Caribbean that co-sponsor these texts.

Regionally, the issue has intersected with other security challenges, such as drug trafficking and gang violence, prompting combined efforts by national authorities and regional fora. In recent years, regional seminars and dialogues involving Latin American and Caribbean legislators and security officials have focused on harmonizing legislative responses and aligning national policies with global instruments like the **Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)** — adopted in 2013 to regulate international arms transfers and help prevent diversion to illicit markets.

Despite these efforts, illicit SALW flows remain a persistent challenge in the region, shaped by historical production and supply patterns, weak controls, and enduring demand linked to criminal and violent actors. Continued implementation of the PoA, enhanced regional cooperation, and stronger legal and operational capacities remain central priorities for addressing the problem effectively.

Current situation and challenges

The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons (SALW) continues to drive violence, organized crime, and insecurity across Latin America and the Caribbean. Illegally trafficked firearms, often originating from both regional and external sources, fuel homicides, gang violence, and transnational criminal activity. Countries like Haiti and others in the Caribbean face particularly high levels of unregistered weapons, while law enforcement struggles to trace and control these arms. (*Illicit weapons fuelling conflicts worldwide, officials warn | The United Nations Office at Geneva*. (2025, November 11). The United Nations Office at Geneva. https://www.ungeneva.org/en/news-

media/news/2025/11/112715/illicit-weapons-fuelling-conflicts-worldwide-officials-warn?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

Key challenges include weak regulatory and enforcement frameworks, porous borders, corruption, diversion from legal markets, and limited regional coordination. These factors, combined with socioeconomic inequalities, perpetuate demand for illicit weapons and hinder efforts to reduce violence and promote security.

QARMAS

- What are the main sources and routes of illicit small arms and light weapons in the region?
- How does the illicit trade of SALW contribute to violence, organized crime, and insecurity?
- Which countries are most affected, and why do some states struggle to control illicit arms?
- What international and regional frameworks exist to combat the illicit SALW trade, and how effective are they?
- What socioeconomic and governance factors drive the demand for and circulation of illegal firearms?

Topic b: Preventing the use of chemical and biological weapons by state and non-state actors.

1. Introduction

The use of chemical and biological weapons represents one of the most dangerous threats to international peace. This weapons are characterized by their high destructive capability and the difficulty of tracing responsibility. This weapons can be used by state and non-state actors, for example, terrorist organizations, their use can cause large-scale humanitarian, environmental and political consequences. In this context, the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly (DISEC) plays a very important role in preventing access to these weapons, by strengthening international frameworks, making nonproliferation treaties and prevention, all of this under the umbrella of international law.

2. Definition of a chemical weapon

"A Chemical Weapon is a chemical used to cause intentional death or harm through its toxic properties. Munitions, devices and other equipment specifically designed to weaponise toxic chemicals also fall under the definition of chemical weapons."

Chemical Weapon Definition in Three Parts:

- **Toxic chemicals and their precursors:** Toxic chemicals are defined as 'any chemical which through its chemical action on life processes can cause death, temporary incapacitation or permanent harm to humans or animals'. This includes all such chemicals, regardless of their origin or of their method of production, and regardless of whether they are produced in facilities, in munitions or elsewhere. Precursors are chemicals that are used for the production of toxic chemicals.
- **Munitions or devices**: Any munitions or devices specifically designed to inflict harm or cause death through the release of toxic chemicals. Among these could be mortars, artillery shells, missiles, bombs, mines or spray tanks.
- **Equipment 'directly in connection' with munitions and devices:** Any equipment specifically designed for use 'directly in connection' with the employment of the munitions and devices identified as chemical weapons.

Information from *Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons*. (2026, January 30). OPCW. https://www.opcw.org/

3. Historical context of chemical weapons

"The international community has long attempted to eliminate chemical weapons. After witnessing the devastating impact of such weapons on the battlefields of the First World War, States negotiated the 1925 Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare (known as the Geneva Protocol), which prohibited the use of chemical and biological weapons in war. This was a significant step forward but not enough to fully eradicate such weapons. While the Protocol prohibited their use, it did not outlaw their development, production and stockpiling. As such, many States continued to develop and stockpile chemical weapons throughout the twentieth century.

In the 1980s and 1990s, events such as the chemical attack in Halabja, Iraq, and the nerve agent attacks in Japan by a non-State actor, reminded the international community that chemical weapons have not yet been consigned to history. These incidents and others like them galvanized renewed calls for stronger international action. After many years of negotiations, the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) was adopted by the Conference on Disarmament, held in Geneva in 1992, and opened for signature in 1993; it entered into force in 1997.

CWC was a landmark achievement—it was the first multilateral treaty to provide for the verifiable elimination of an entire category of weapons of mass destruction by prohibiting the development, production, acquisition, stockpiling, retention, transfer or use of chemical weapons by States Parties.

Over the years, 193 countries have joined CWC, which translates to approximately 98 per cent of the world's population living under the protection of the Convention.

CWC also established OPCW as the implementing body for the Convention. An essential component of the mission of OPCW since its establishment has been the destruction of stockpiles declared by States Parties to the Convention. In 2023, after 25 years of dedicated and diligent work, OPCW verified that all declared stockpiles of chemical weapons around the world, totalling 72,304 metric tonnes, had been irreversibly destroyed. This was a milestone achievement for the disarmament regime and an important step towards the goal of a world free of chemical weapons." (United Nations. (n.d.). *We Must Remain Committed to a World Free of Chemical Weapons | United Nations*. https://www.un.org/en/un-chronicle/we-must-remain-committed-world-free-chemical-weapons)

4. Definition of a biological weapon

Biological weapons disseminate disease-causing organisms or toxins to harm or kill humans, animals or plants. They can be deadly and highly contagious. Diseases caused by such weapons would not be confined to national borders and could spread rapidly around the world. The consequences of the deliberate release of biological agents or toxins by state or non-state actors could be dramatic.

Almost any disease-causing organism (such as bacteria, viruses, fungi, prions or rickettsiae) or toxin (poisons derived from animals, plants or microorganisms, or similar substances produced synthetically) can be used in biological weapons. The agents can be enhanced from their natural state to make them more suitable for mass production, storage, and dissemination as weapons. Historical biological weapons programmes have included efforts to produce: aflatoxin; anthrax; botulinum toxin; foot-and-mouth disease; glanders; plague; Q fever; rice blast; ricin; Rocky Mountain spotted fever; smallpox; and tularaemia, among others.

In practice, should a suspicious disease event occur, it would be difficult to determine if it was caused by nature, an accident, sabotage, or an act of biological warfare or terrorism. Consequently, the response to a biological event, whether natural, accidental or deliberate, would involve the coordination of actors from many sectors who together possess the capability to determine the cause and attribute it to a specific source. Likewise, the preparedness for and prevention of such an event should also involve multi-sectoral coordination. For more information about preparing for and responding to disease outbreaks and biological weapons attacks, please see the frequently asked questions published by the World Health Organization.

(UN office for Disarmament Affairs.)

5. Historical context of biological weapons

- ***Pre-20th-century use of biological weapons:***

One of the first recorded uses of biological warfare occurred in 1347, when Mongol forces are reported to have catapulted plague-infested bodies over the walls into the Black Sea port of Caffa (now Feodosiya, Ukraine), at that time a Genoese trade centre in the Crimean Peninsula. Some historians believe that ships from the besieged city returned to Italy with the plague, starting the Black Death pandemic that swept through Europe over the next four years and killed some 25 million people (about one-third of the population).

In 1710 a Russian army fighting Swedish forces barricaded in Reval (now Tallinn, Estonia) also hurled plague-infested corpses over the city's walls. In 1763 British troops besieged at Fort Pitt (now Pittsburgh) during Pontiac's Rebellion passed blankets infected with smallpox virus to the Indians, causing a devastating epidemic among their ranks.

- ***Biological weapons in the World Wars***

During World War I (1914–18) Germany initiated a clandestine program to infect horses and cattle owned by Allied armies on both the Western and Eastern fronts. The infectious agent for glanders was reported to have been used. For example, German agents infiltrated the United States and surreptitiously infected animals prior to their shipment across the Atlantic in support of Allied forces. In addition, there reportedly was a German attempt in 1915 to spread plague in St. Petersburg in order to weaken Russian resistance.

The horrors of World War I caused most countries to sign the 1925 Geneva Protocol banning the use of biological and chemical weapons in war. Nevertheless, Japan, one of the signatory parties to the protocol, engaged in a massive and clandestine research, development, production, and testing program in biological warfare, and it violated the treaty's ban when it used biological weapons against Allied forces in China between 1937 and 1945. The Japanese not only used biological weapons in China, but they also experimented on and killed more than 3,000 human subjects (including Allied prisoners of war) in tests of biological warfare agents and various biological weapons delivery mechanisms. The Japanese experimented with the infectious agents for bubonic plague, anthrax, typhus, smallpox, yellow fever, tularemia, hepatitis, cholera, gas gangrene, and glanders, among others.

Although there is no documented evidence of any other use of biological weapons in World War II, both sides had active research and development (R&D) programs. The Japanese use of biological warfare agents against the Chinese led to an American decision to undertake biological warfare research in order to understand better how to defend against the threat and provide, if necessary, a retaliatory capability. The United Kingdom, Germany, and the Soviet Union had similar R&D programs during World War II, but only Japan has been proved to have used such weapons in the war.

- ***Biological weapons in the Cold War***

In the Cold War era, which followed World War II, both the Soviet Union and the United States, as well as their respective allies, embarked on large-scale biological warfare R&D and weapons production programs. Those programs were required by law to be halted and dismantled upon the signing of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) in 1972 and the entry into force of that treaty in 1975. In the case of the United States and its allies, compliance with the terms of the treaty appears to have been complete. Such was not the case with the Soviet Union, which conducted an aggressive clandestine biological warfare program even though it had signed and ratified the treaty. The lack of a verification

regime to check members' compliance with the BWC made it easier for the Soviets to flout the treaty without being detected.

After the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 and its subsequent division into 15 independent states, Russian Pres. Boris Yeltsin confirmed that the Soviet Union had violated the BWC, and he pledged to terminate what remained of the old Soviet biological weapons program. (See also yellow rain.) However, another problem remained—that of the potential transfer of information, technical assistance, production equipment, materials, and even finished biological weapons to states and groups outside the borders of the former Soviet Union. The United States and the former Soviet republics pledged to work together to contain the spread of biological warfare capabilities. With financing from the U.S. Cooperative Threat Reduction Program and other sources, help in obtaining civilian jobs in other fields was also made available for some of the estimated 60,000 scientists and technicians who had worked in the Soviet biological warfare programs.

- ***Biological weapons proliferation***

Of the more than 190 members of the United Nations, only a dozen or so are strongly suspected of having ongoing biological weapons programs. However, such programs can be easily hidden and disguised as vaccine plants and benign pharmaceutical-production centres. Biological weapons are not as expensive to manufacture as nuclear weapons, yet a lethal biological weapon might nonetheless be the strategic weapon that would win a war. This prospect of military advantage might tempt some regimes to acquire the weapons, though perhaps clandestinely.

Since the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) has no existing verification or inspection procedures to verify compliance by its signatories, cheating on the treaty might be done with no outside proof to the contrary. It is entirely possible that even a small and relatively poor state might successfully embark on a biological warfare program with a small capital investment and a few dozen biologists, all of which could be secretly housed within a few buildings. In fact, a biological weapons program might also be within the technical and financial reach of a terrorist organization. In summary, the degree of biological weapons proliferation is highly uncertain, difficult to detect, and difficult to quantify.

- ***Biological terrorism***

Biological weapons have been used in a few instances in the past by terrorist organizations. In the 1980s followers of the exiled Indian self-proclaimed guru Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh settled on a ranch in Wasco county, Oregon, U.S. The “Rajneeshies” took political control of the nearby town of Antelope, changing its name to Rajneesh, and in 1984 they attempted to extend their political control throughout the county by suppressing voter turnout in the more populous town of The Dalles. Leading up to the countywide elections, cult members experimented with contaminating groceries, restaurants, and the water supply in The Dalles with Salmonella bacteria. Their efforts made at least 751 people ill. The plot was not discovered until the year after the attack, when one of the participants confessed.

In the period from April 1990 to July 1995, the AUM Shinrikyo sect used both biological and chemical weapons on targets in Japan. The members’ biological attacks were largely unsuccessful because they never mastered the science and technology of biological warfare. Nevertheless, they attempted four attacks using anthrax and six using botulinum toxin on various targets, including a U.S. naval base at Yokosuka.

Al-Qaeda operatives have shown an interest in developing and using biological weapons, and they operated an anthrax laboratory in Afghanistan prior to its being overrun by U.S. and Afghan Northern Alliance forces in 2001–02. In 2001 anthrax-laden letters were sent to many politicians and other prominent individuals in the United States. The letters killed 5 people and sent 22 to the hospital while forcing the evacuation of congressional office buildings, the offices of the governor of New York, several television network headquarters, and a tabloid newspaper office. This event caused many billions of dollars in cleanup, decontamination, and investigation costs. In early 2010, more than eight years after the mailings, the Federal Bureau of Investigation finally closed its investigation, having concluded that the letters were mailed by a microbiologist who had worked in the U.S. Army’s biological defense effort for years and who committed suicide in 2008 after being named a suspect in the investigation.

Information on the manufacture of biological and chemical weapons has been disseminated widely on the Internet, and basic scientific information is also within the reach of many researchers at biological laboratories around the world. Unfortunately, it thus seems likely that poisons and disease agents will be used as terrorist weapons in the future.

Information from: (Schenider, 2025)

6. Current situation and challenges

Yet despite the near-universal commitment to CWC and the progress made on the destruction of declared stockpiles, the world is still not free from the threat of chemical weapons, and concerns are growing about their re-emergence. The continued use of chemical weapons has raised serious concerns within the international community—in Malaysia, the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Kingdom—and allegations of chemical weapons use have also been made in several ongoing conflicts. Even more alarming is the deplorable use of such weapons against civilians.
(Nakamitsu, 2026)

7. QARMAS

- How can the international community strengthen the implementation and enforcement of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological Weapons Convention, particularly in states with limited capacities?
- What measures can be adopted to prevent non-state actors, such as terrorist groups, from accessing dual-use chemical and biological materials?
- How can DISEC promote greater international cooperation in intelligence-sharing, biosecurity, and export controls while respecting state sovereignty?
- What role should international organizations, such as the OPCW and the United Nations, play in investigating alleged uses of chemical or biological weapons?
- How can scientific and technological advances be regulated to prevent their weaponization without hindering legitimate development in fields such as medicine and industry?

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