BACKGROUND GUIDE

UNROCA

Agenda: Assessing Mandatory and Voluntary Reporting Mechanisms for Arms Acquisition and Expenditure

Letter from the Executive Board

Greetings delegates,

It is with great pleasure that we, the Executive Board for UNROCA Special Working Group, present to you the consolidated background guide on the following agenda, "Assessing Mandatory and Voluntary Reporting Mechanisms for Arms Acquisition and Expenditure". There is a lot of matter covered by the background guide itself; however, we hope this acts as only a catalyst for furthering your research, and is not limited to just this guide.

The delegates are expected to do thorough research about the agenda item in order to gain a solid understanding of what the discourse in the committee is going to revolve around. We, the Executive Board, can only moderate debate; however, it is you that can facilitate and control the same.

At any point during your research, do not hesitate to contact the Executive Board Members for clarifications. Please note that this guide cannot be used as proof during the committee proceedings under any circumstance. The idea of a Model UN is a debate competition, but the best way to approach it is with a learner's mindset. You are here to learn about how the world works, and the powers that control it. Take this as a learning experience, meet new people, and have a good time. All the best for your research, and we hope to see you at Oakridge Bachupally Model United Nations 2025.

Best regards,

The Executive Board.

Chair - Rusheel Alla
Vice Chair - Parnika Reddy

Guidelines

- Read the entirety of the background guide in the order it was written. Make sure to highlight the names of specific treaties, documents, resolutions, conventions, international bodies, events and any other specific incidents so that you can get back to them later and do a lot more thorough research.

- Understand some of the basic details regarding the country that you've been allotted whether this be the capital, current affairs regarding geopolitical situation, political hierarchy etc. While not strictly necessary, you never know when this can turn out to be handy. Geography Now's A - Z Country List has been a particularly helpful resource for this.

- Use a search engine of your choice to create as many tabs as possible for the highlighted terms from your background guide. Wikipedia or a YouTube video act as a great way to get a brief summary of the incidents at hand but such sources (especially Wikipedia articles) cannot be used in committee as sources.

- Delve into deeper research regarding the particular position of your allocation with the agenda at hand. Try searching for the voting stances of your allocation in related conventions and understanding the reasons for voting as so. UN Press Releases are also a helpful source for this matter.

- Find the website for the foreign ministry of the country you have been assigned alongside the "Permanent Mission of COUNTRY to the United Nations" website and search for a key term relating to the agenda, this should often give you statements from recent press conferences or UN committee sessions that can act as valuable sources of information in forming a position.

- Keep a handy copy of the Charter of the United Nations, whether as a .pdf file extension or a physical copy works. This contains the founding principles of the United Nations and contains articles that lay out the mandate of the six bodies that the United Nations is primarily divided into. Spend some additional time researching the specific mandate and functions of the committee that you have been assigned.

- The Executive Board may ask for the source of a statement that a delegate makes in committee either during a Point of Order circumstance or if said statement stands to be of interest to the Executive Board. Therefore, it is recommended that delegates keep track of their sources when making / disputing a claim and also ensure their validity. Please do remember that while you as a delegate are allowed to cite any source you wish during committee.

Hierarchy of Evidence

Evidence can be presented from a wide variety of sources, but not all sources are treated as equal. Here's the hierarchy in which evidence is categorised:

Tier 1: Includes any publication, statement, resolution, or document released by any of the Nations' official organs or committees; any publication, statement, or document released by a UN member state in its own capacity. The evidence falling in this tier is considered most reliable during the simulation.

Tier 2: Includes: any news article published by any official media source that is owned and controlled by a UN member state. E.g.: Xinhua News (China), Prasar Bharti (India), BBC (United Kingdom) etcetera. The evidence falling in this tier is considered sufficiently reliable in case no other evidence from any Tier 1 source is available on that particular fact, event, or situation.

Tier 3: Includes: any publication from news sources of international repute such as Reuters, The New York Times, Agence-France Presse, etcetera. The evidence falling under this tier is considered the least reliable for the purposes of this simulation. Yet, if no better source is available in a certain scenario, it may be considered.

Foreign Policy and Foreign Relations

Foreign policy, in simple terms, is what your country aims to achieve in regard to the issue at hand or in general with its relations with other countries.

1. What role must foreign policy play in your research?

Understanding the foreign policy of your country must be a checkbox that you tick off at the very beginning of your research. Your foreign policy should dictate everything from the arguments you make, the reasoning you give for making those arguments, and the actions you take in the Council.

2. Where do I look to find foreign policy?

Most of the time, foreign policy is not explicitly stated. It must be inferred from the actions and statements issued by the country. Reading the meeting records from previous meetings of UNSC (or any other UN body where your country might have spoken on the issue) is a great place to start. If such records are unavailable, look for statements from your country's Foreign Ministry (or equivalent like Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry for Foreign Affairs etcetera) and top leadership (PM, Pres., Secretary of State, Defence Minister).

Foreign Relations on the other hand refers to the diplomatic ties that one country has with another and considers elements such as the mutual presence of embassies, consulates, ambassadors & diplomatic dialogue. More often than not, foreign policy is what will be of your primary concern during the MUN, but it is important to also consider any extremities in your allotted country's foreign relations.

Rules of Procedure

ROP, or rules of procedure are the set rules to be followed whilst in committee session. Rules of procedure are generally the same for all simulated conferences, and some parts can be amended based on the executive board of that specific conference. Since the ROP is universally followed.

ROP

Introduction to the Committee

The UN General Assembly established the UN Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA) in 1991 through resolution 46/36 L in order to promote transparency in arms and ammunition. Through the UNROCA instrument, Member States are requested to report annually, international transfers of seven categories which range from conventional arms to light and small arms.

They may also provide additional background information, such as data on military holdings and procurement through national production. To date, 175 Member States have reported to the UNROCA instrument at least once. In light of relatively consistent reporting by the world's largest arms exporters, it is estimated that the Register captures around 90 percent of the volume of the global arms trade.

As you will read further in the background guide, since 1994, the Secretary-General has convened a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) every three years to assess UNROCA's functioning and propose measures for its improvement. For the purposes of this committee, the debate is going to follow the same format.

Necessity for Reporting

The United Nations Register of Conventional Arms was established as a confidence-building measure to prevent the disproportionate accumulation of arms, promote trust amongst member states, and strengthen regional and global security. By openly reporting their acquisitions, member states reduce the risk of an arms race, or even conflicts.

A key issue in post conflict settings is transparency. After a significant conflict, which not only affects the economic and humanitarian situation of a region, the volume and type of weapons are often very ambiguous, which hinders any efforts for disarmament or peace building initiatives. By confiding and reporting to the UNROCA, arms monitoring reassures the member states to build confidence, for stability, and not for conflict.

Consistent reporting to the UNROCA is absolutely essential to uphold peace across the world, whether by voluntary or mandatory means. It fosters trust, supports peacebuilding, aids embargo enforcement, and provides a factual basis for responsible rearmament.

Reporting Categories

Category I – Battle Tanks

These are classified as tracked or wheeled self-propelled armoured fighting vehicles with high cross-country mobility, substantial self-protection, an unladen weight of at least 16.5
metric tons, and equipped with a high muzzle velocity direct fire main gun of at least 75 mm calibre.

Category II – Armoured Combat Vehicles (ACVs)

ACV's are defined as tracked, semi-tracked, or wheeled self-propelled vehicles with armoured protection and cross-country capability that are either designed to transport a squad of four or more infantrymen or armed with an integral or organic weapon of at least 12.5 mm calibre or a missile launcher.

Category III – Large-Calibre Artillery Systems

Large Calibre Artillery Systems include guns, howitzers, artillery pieces combining gun/howitzer characteristics, mortars, or multiple-launch rocket systems with a calibre of 75 mm and above, capable of engaging surface targets primarily through indirect fire.

Category IV – Combat Aircraft & Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles (UCAVs)

These include manned fixed-wing or variable-geometry wing aircraft, as well as unmanned aerial platforms, designed, equipped, or modified to engage targets with guided missiles, unguided rockets, bombs, guns, or other destructive weapons, including those configured for electronic warfare, suppression of air defences, or reconnaissance missions.

Category V – Attack Helicopters

Attack Helicopters are rotary-wing aircraft designed, equipped, or modified to engage targets using guided or unguided anti-armour, air-to-surface, air-to-subsurface, or air-to-air weapons, and equipped with integrated fire-control and aiming systems.

Category VI – Warships

Warships are vessels or submarines for military use with a standard displacement of 500 metric tons or above, or smaller vessels equipped to launch missiles with a range of at least 25 kilometres or torpedoes with similar range.

Category VII – Missiles & Missile Launchers

Guided or unguided rockets, ballistic or cruise missiles with a range of at least 25 kilometres, and the systems designed or modified to launch them, including remotely piloted vehicles that meet these criteria. This category also includes man-portable air-defence systems (MANPADS).

Challenges to Reporting

In order to report to the UNROCA, member states require robust mechanisms, which many unfortunately lack due to developmental issues or political issues. Mainly, technical barriers such as faulty record-keeping systems, evolving category definitions, and other interpretation issues wreak havoc for reporting mechanisms, especially for states with limited resources. Small arms and light weapons (SALW) also act as an additional burden, as their volume, dispersion, and frequent movement through informal channels make them harder to track than major conventional systems. Member States do also withhold or aggregate information over concerns about revealing data integral to national security, military procurement strategies, or commercially protected details, particularly in regions that involve security issues. The lack of a verification mechanism with the UNODA, also makes reporting a massive concern. This is also compounded by the "reporting fatigue" from overlapping obligations under other mechanisms. All in all, these issues come together and ultimately challenge the effectiveness of the Register.

Protracted Conflicts

Transparency in arms acquisitions is an absolute must, considering the fact that protracted conflicts are sustained and driven by large inflows of weapons, especially Small and Light Arms. SIPRI estimates conflict-related fatalities rose to about 239,000 in 2024, with five major conflicts each exceeding 10,000 deaths, and the Israel–Gaza conflict alone accounting for over 45,500 Palestinian fatalities in 2024. Arms deliveries to active battlefields have also surged, with SIPRI reporting that Ukraine's imports in 2020–24 grew almost 100x compared with 2015–19, and Ukraine was the single largest recipient of major arms in 2020–24.

Group of Governmental Experts (GGE's) Throughout the Years

When the General Assembly created UNROCA, it also called for its subsequent regular review in order to allow the Register to adapt to a changing security environment where new weapons may become prevalent. Thus, one of the outcomes of the review could include recommendations to amend the scope of the Register to take into account such developments, as well as adjustments to the status of the background information that Member States are invited to provide. Thus, since 1994, the Secretary-General has appointed a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) every three years to review the operation of UNROCA and make recommendations for its further development. As a result of GGE recommendations, its scope was modestly expanded a number of times during the past years of its existence, with several amendments made as a result of recommendation of each of the last three GGEs.

1994

This iteration of the GGE meeting cemented the seven core categories, established that the UNROCA was a confidence-building measure rather than a disarmament mechanism, and introduced the concept of "nil reporting" as a way to keep member states engaged with the reporting mechanism despite no acquisitions.

2003

The 2003 convening resulted in the lowering of artillery thresholds, expanding the warships category, and explicitly adding Man-Portable Air-Defense Systems (MANPADS) as well. This was instrumental, considering the post 9/11 security climate.

2006

Alongside the 7 categories, the UNROCA introduced the +1 category, which included Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) as a supplementary category, considering their impact in interstate conflicts and how accessible they were.

2016

Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles (UCAV's) were added under "combat aircraft," in this iteration of the GGE convening.

2022

This meeting saw Category V be updated in order to include rotary-wing unmanned combat aerial vehicles, reaffirmed the "7 + 1" formula for SALW reporting, and introduced standardized optional forms for procurement through national production and military holdings.

Assessing Arms Acquisition and Expenditure

The assessment of arms acquisition and military expenditure through reporting mechanisms is absolutely essential for maintaining international peace and security. In 2024, global military spending touched an estimated US$2.72 trillion, a 9.4 per cent increase from the previous year, with the United States of America and the People's Republic of China accounting for close to half of said total. With such an extensive spending on arms, the chances of gaps in reporting becomes ever more necessary to tackle these gaps. Arms transfers are also heavily concentrated, with the top five suppliers responsible for about 71 per cent of exports between 2020 and 2024.

Without voluntary and mandatory reporting mechanisms that can be easily verifiable by parties, it becomes extremely difficult to determine whether or not the procurement of arms is a defensive, or an offensive manoeuvre. Frameworks that are already in place, such as the Arms Trade Treaty, ensure accountability is maintained. Voluntary mechanisms like the UNROCA, complement these by enabling all Member States to report on transfers, holdings and national production, including small arms and light weapons. Regular reviews, led by the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE's) since 1994, ensure that this reporting mechanism remains relevant to evolving environments and new developments in the weapons sphere.

Relevant International Material

1. Inter-American Convention on Transparency in Conventional Weapons Acquisitions (CITAAC)

2. The Wassenaar Arrangement

3. Vienna Document on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures
4. The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)

Reading Material

For delegates to attain a greater clarity with regards to how the reporting mechanism works, the Executive Board highly recommends going through the following documents.

1. https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/46/36

2. UNROCA Background Paper

3. Continuing operation of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and its further development

Conclusion

As mentioned in the letter from the Executive Board, this background guide serves as a catalyst for research. With a broad agenda such as this, breaking down the agenda into sub-topics will aid the committee's understanding of the agenda, along with the facilitation of high quality debate. The Questions to be Answered and QARMA sections will help you for the same.

Questions to be Answered

These are questions you'll need to answer together as a committee; questions that you'll likely disagree on. **Please read these and pay special attention, as these are the primary lines you'll debate on.**

1. How can the need for transparency in arms acquisition and expenditure reporting with the protection of sensitive national security information be balanced?

2. Should another category be added to the reporting mechanism, such as AI-powered Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS)?

3. Would a phased or tiered model for mandatory reporting be more effective in achieving near-universal compliance than immediate full implementation?

4. How can participation be encouraged from non-ATT member states in mandatory reporting without creating perceptions of political or legal overreach?

5. In what ways can improved reporting on arms acquisitions and expenditure be utilised as an early warning tool to prevent the escalation of regional conflicts?

Questions a Resolution Must Answer

1. What are the specific goals, objectives and outcomes you are aiming to achieve and the measure of success?

2. Who is responsible for implementing the resolution's provisions? Are there clear roles and responsibilities assigned to various stakeholders?

3. What resources are required to implement the resolution effectively? How will these resources be mobilised and allocated?

4. How will the progress and effectiveness of the resolution be monitored and evaluated?

5. Does the resolution consider the needs and perspectives and address potential disparities of all relevant stakeholders?