



# **Environment and climate responsiveness in the UN Programme of Action:**

Mainstreaming Climate and the Environment  
in Weapon and Ammunition Management

**Working Paper | Mines Advisory Group (MAG)**

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United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation  
of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit  
Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects





## SUMMARY

This paper aims to make a case for recognition of the climate, peace and security intersection in the outcome document of the Fourth Review Conference on the Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (UN PoA). It highlights the link between the consequences of climate change and weapons proliferation, as well as the increased diversion risk in the case of natural disasters. A short overview of interactions between weapons and ammunition management (WAM) and

climate follows, emphasising the importance of a strong assessment process and steps being taken to address issues raised. The paper also covers environmental concerns which are especially acute regarding weapons destruction and emphasises the need to identify appropriate technical interventions that respond to the national context. It also makes some recommendations for additions or changes to the outcome document that aim to mainstream climate and the environment.



## INTRODUCTION

**1.** Climate change and related phenomena, including extreme temperatures, high winds, flooding, rising sea levels, and soil erosion, present a critical global challenge. Although different countries and regions experience the effects different ways, climate change is part of the operational and political reality in every context. Across all sectors, from private to public to NGOs, and from nutrition to shelter to tax reform, are taking action – both upstream planning to mitigate and respond to climate-related risks and downstream measures to mitigate harm to the natural environment.

**2.** The climate crisis is driving the international community to thinking differently, and this shift should also be reflected in disarmament and arms control actions. To date, climate and environmental concerns have not been considered within the framework of the UN Programme of Action (UN PoA) or any other international instrument relating to conventional weapons.

The Fourth Review Conference is an opportunity to strengthen climate responsiveness and environmental sensitivity, incorporating both upstream and downstream measures which are especially needed in relation to stockpile management. This can be done without additional burden – some suggestions for the outcome document are in the final section.

**3.** This paper is informed by MAG's practical implementation of weapons and ammunition management (WAM) in several countries and regions, where climate planning and environmental impact have come into sharp focus, particularly in the past two years working in partnership with CARICOM IMPACS. Caribbean states are on the frontline of climate change, and their commitment to building climate resilience informed the regional WAM programme from the start. Lessons learned from working with this group of states have crystallised – together with experience from other countries and regions – to a more deliberate application of a climate lens in WAM activities.







## CONTEXT

**4.** The intersection of climate, peace and security is complex – but it is clear that widespread availability SALW increases the likelihood of social tensions escalating into armed violence. Coastal communities are especially vulnerable when livelihoods are threatened by erosion of land resources and damage to fisheries. Competition for resources drives both inter-communal violence and increased criminality. This too is facilitated by easy access to SALW, with people turning to piracy or illicit trafficking of narcotics, arms and human beings to replace lost sources of income. In this and other similar scenarios, both climate change and SALW proliferation are drivers of conflict and violence, with a mutual multiplying effect.

**5.** In the immediate aftermath of a natural disaster such as flooding, a hurricane, or a typhoon, diversion risk will often sharply increase. On several occasions MAG has supported rapid response to secure storage facilities damaged during a natural disaster, leaving stockpiles vulnerable.

During this phase of a crisis, security forces are also responsible for preserving the rule of law; in some states especially small islands, they provide the frontline emergency response. In this situation, proliferation of weapons and ammunition is a significant risk factor and could arguably be considered as a disaster risk reduction activity.

**6.** Discussions in the UN PoA forum have frequently noted the importance of context in its implementation. In the global context, climate change should be recognised as a significant factor. Actions aiming to strengthen human security cannot remain detached from the environment in times of climate crisis. Acknowledging the intersection and relevance of climate, peace and security also reflects the approach set out by the UN Secretary General in the New Agenda for Peace. The reference in the Zero Draft to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also makes an important link to climate change via SDG 13.



## THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON WAM

**7.** Extreme weather induced by climate change threatens basic accountability and inventory management where storage facilities are vulnerable to fire, high winds, and flooding. A significant example of harmful effects concerns paper-based record keeping, which can be easily destroyed by one of the aforementioned climate-change-induced phenomena.

**8.** Damage to weapons and ammunition held as evidence, or the associated records, risks undermining the chain of evidence and failure of critical prosecutions associated with transnational organised crime. This is a common issue that threaten national and international response to organised crime.

**9.** Rising sea levels, high water tables and soil erosion cause damage to legally held SALW stockpiles. This undermines the responsiveness of key security forces, such as coastguards, who are essential to combat trafficking and illegal fishing that depletes essential stocks.

**10.** The same factors also threaten the infrastructure of coastal armouries and ammunition depots. Degradation of ammunition caused by saltwater increases the risk of unplanned explosions.

**11.** Recognising the aforementioned risks and incorporating them during the assessment process is key. MAG will always work closely with our national focal point so that we have a clear understanding of the context and needs. Emphasising the inclusion of a climate/environment angle from the start can encourage different insights.

**12.** Any new facilities are in safe areas and that those being rehabilitated are given sufficient protection or, if at high risk, an alternative location could be suggested.

**13.** MAG is also working on GIS mapping that will draw on data around predicted weather patterns and overlay them with assessment information and planned activities. This will be used to understand whether a facility might become vulnerable in future as weather changes, effectively futureproofing the facility.

**14.** Some states who have been reliant on paper records are moving forward with a digitalisation plan, which is encouraging.

**15.** Climate change is also a constant threat to ammunition storage globally. Extreme temperatures cause instability in munitions being stored and could result in unplanned explosions. Longer and hotter summers and shorter winters increase the risk especially in countries with insufficient funding to provide adequate security measures and technical oversight.



## THE IMPACT OF WAM ON CLIMATE CHANGE

**16.** States and other actors implementing WAM activities should not remain indifferent to the general will to address the climate crisis. This is also critical for humanitarian disarmament organisations, such as MAG, which abide by the “do no harm” principle.

**17.** Destruction of SALW and ammunition presents an environmental – and logistical – challenge for many states. Initially, the method of destruction should be assessed and tailored to context. For example, hydraulic shears may not be appropriate for a state with a small number of weapons for destruction process. In this instance, starting up the shears by attaching them to a generator is environmentally damaging and costly; assessment would look at these factors and use a circular saw for destruction.

**18.** After destruction, states are left with a collection of weapons now cut into pieces, in line with best practice. Subsequent disposal of this scrap metal becomes a major challenge. In some countries, the scrap metal is still legally defined as a firearm – meaning it cannot be sold to another country.

A number of environmentally concerning disposal methods have been used, including throwing scrap metal in the sea and burying it on land – where chemicals in the metal will leech into the water table.

**19.** Many countries need support to identify suitable destruction methods and assess the environmental impact cost of different methods, including possible regional solutions. In some countries, the accumulation of scrap metal has caused destruction activities to be suspended due to lack of storage space.

**20.** Special mitigation measures are sometimes needed to protect the environment, including white phosphorous contamination resulting from unplanned explosions, destruction of incendiary powder (otherwise known as napalm), and destruction of liquid explosives. One case of 20,000kg of aluminium octoate was disposed of through neutralisation – the chemical is mixed with other components to alter its characteristics and reduce the hazard. The neutralized component is then stored in a security cell and monitored. Such cases highlight the importance of including environmental awareness in training of personnel.







## RECOMMENDATIONS

- a)** Replace paragraphs 35 and 36 of the Zero Draft with “Recognising the growing intersection between climate, peace and security”
- b)** Reference to natural disasters in paragraph 128 of the Zero Draft, “... from exacerbating ongoing conflicts and regions emerging from recent conflict, as well as natural disasters”.
- c)** Alternatively to letter ‘b’, rename the section “PoA in crisis and post-crisis situations” so that natural disasters are included.
- d)** Include a new paragraph around paragraphs 123 or 125 that reads “To consider the environmental impact of destruction methods and exchange best practices, taking into account the national capacities and resources available and the feasibility within each context”