

A register would do well to be timely and dynamic, given the large and active trading which is characteristic of global light weapons transfers. Thus, it should be able to keep abreast of and publicize the latest movements or risk the possibility of being hopelessly out of date in any reporting period. However, it should not be so up-to-date as to compromise legitimate commercially sensitive information and, thus, work to the detriment of member states.

The mechanics of a register should cater for less technologically advanced nations by being simple in design and capable of accepting other than the preferred electronic data format inputs. In addition, a register should be able to function even if only a portion of the desired data can be provided by a national authority. Simplicity should also contribute to reasonable cost, always a consideration as a result of both international and domestic budgetary controls.

Data which is handled in an unclassified manner is easier and cheaper to work with than confidential information and the possibility of unauthorized release is high with so many agencies handling confidential information. Keeping data unclassified in the public domain could add to the transparency factor, the ultimate object of a light weapons register, and demonstrate a tangible commitment to the effectiveness of the register.

Lastly, to ensure that the myriad of details are properly completed, the administration is smooth and all members have a common opportunity to participate fully, a central staff or secretariat should be formed to provide proper support for the register's operation.

The model light weapons register in Part Two of this paper is based upon the above set of requirements. The register is in outline only because participants may wish to modify, delete or add to the suggested model. For instance, categories of weapons could be changed or more closely defined; some data may be felt not to be appropriate and may be deleted. The aim is to create a basic model register which can still function with any modification necessitated after negotiation by the participating nations.

The question remains: will such a register be useful and effective in increasing transparency, thus building confidence and security among nations as well as reducing the carnage within nations caused by the availability of large quantities of light weapons? A similar question has been asked about the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms by a number of researchers. No doubt, in many areas, the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms has fallen far short of the goals hoped for by its more idealistic founders. Conversely, it does function after a fashion and provides some elements of information which have been unavailable previously. In some cases, the spotlight of public scrutiny has been shone on areas of trade which were hitherto considered to be solely in the domain of national governmental decision-makers.

This fact, applied to the light weapons situation, may be more than some governments and weapon industrialists may wish. It was the opinion of some participants in the UN Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms that transparency was not an achievable goal due to the many and varied dealings in light weapons holdings by governments and commercial interests.⁴⁷