

1.4 Improving Information Exchange

Improvements in regular, timely and efficient information exchange and consultation across the region between officials and agencies involved in combating illicit arms trafficking are major priorities. Measures to achieve such improvements are discussed further in section 4 below.

2. STRENGTHENING REGULATION AND CONTROLS ON ACCUMULATION AND TRANSFERS OF ARMS

Southern African countries need to embark on a collective programme to strengthen and harmonise their national regulations and controls on the transfer, possession and use of arms. This is required to enable them to meet their responsibilities to exercise control and restraint in the import, export, transit and accumulation of arms, and to help to combat illicit possession and trafficking. This programme should be closely associated with collective efforts to update and develop compatible national policies relating to the possession, accumulation and transfer of both commercial arms and armaments held by state agencies; this is urgently needed in many areas.

Such a programme should include national and regional measures in the following areas:

2.1 Strengthen Controls over Civilian Possession of Firearms

National systems for licensing and controlling civilian possession and trading of firearms and ammunition need to be strengthened throughout Southern Africa, and made more effective and compatible through regional co-operation, using SARPCCO and other available regional institutions.

To pursue this objective, SADC countries should consider the following measures:

- Conduct a co-ordinated review of national procedures and criteria for issuing and holding firearms licences, making full use of SARPCCO, with the aim of agreeing common systems and “model statutes” reflecting best practice in stringently controlling civilian possession of firearms in the region. Such procedures should aim to limit, and ultimately remove, the scope for civilians to possess firearms legitimately for the purposes of self-defence (unless they require them for special professional duties), as confidence in the state’s ability to assure individual security improves. Procedures for periodically reviewing licenses should be adopted, and also for requiring or encouraging the surrender and destruction or responsible disposal of weapons that are no longer needed.
- Establish a regional consultation process, through SARPCCO or other relevant institutions, to agree common penalties for firearms-related offences across the region and adopt best practice on regulating the types of arms that can legally be held by civilians (for example, banning possession of automatic weapons or military assault rifles), and other issues of concern.
- Establish and maintain national electronic databases of licensed arms, gun owners, and commercial arms traders within each SADC country, and establish regional systems to allow authorities in partner countries efficiently to check licenses and backgrounds of migrants, etc.
- Establish a standardised and effective system across the region for licensing and monitoring