

FACT SHEET

TRANSPARENCY: UNITED NATIONS REGISTER OF CONVENTIONAL ARMS

Governments can report to the United Nations their arms imports and exports. Reporting voluntarily on weapons transfers can create trust between countries. Sharing such information can help determine whether excessive or destabilising accumulations of arms is taking place, and can contribute to early warning and preventive diplomacy. Also, being open about armaments may encourage restraint in the transfer or production of arms. Transparency is as important for those countries that are large-scale arms traders, as it is for those importing or exporting few or no weapons.

In 1991 the General Assembly created the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms: an annual reporting mechanism through which governments can submit and share information on arms they transferred the previous year. Member States reporting to it provide important information on the build-up and volume of conventional arsenals which may help a country maintain a credible defence and perform effective peacekeeping tasks.

What to report?

The UN Register has a two-tier system of reporting: transfer in seven pre-defined categories and additional background information

The seven categories are:

-  **I. Battle tanks**
-  **II. Armoured combat vehicles**
-  **III. Large-calibre artillery systems**
-  **IV. Combat aircraft and unmanned combat aerial vehicles**
-  **V. Attack helicopters**
-  **VI. Warships**
-  **VII. Missiles / missile launchers**

Additionally, countries can report on:
Small arms & light weapons

Furthermore, countries can report on:
Military holdings
Procurement through national production
Relevant policies / national legislation

“There is a surprising commonality across countries in the signals that build confidence ... Measures to improve transparency of information and decision-making processes can be important in building confidence, as well as laying the basis for sustained institutional transformation.”

World Development Report 2011
on Conflict, Security, and Development

“Trust is the greatest asset a country can have.”

President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia

Why these weapons categories?

The Register's ability to achieve its declared aim depends on how well it covers all relevant weapons categories and the extent of participation by governments. **Currently, the Register focuses primarily on transfers of seven categories of major weapons systems.** Governments are also encouraged to report transfers of small arms and light weapons in parallel with the seven categories, on a trial basis. Most countries submitting reports now include small arms in their submissions.

Review every three years

When the General Assembly created the Register, it also called for its subsequent regular reviews in order to allow the Register to be flexible and to adapt to a changing security environment where new weapons may become prevalent. Thus, since 1994, the Register has been reviewed every three years and its scope has been modestly expanded. Following recommendations from the most recent review of the Register, which took place in 2016, category IV of the Register has been expanded to also cover transfers of unmanned combat aerial vehicles.

Facts:

- Since its inception in 1991, the UN Register has received reports from more than 170 States.
- On average, more than 60 countries report annually to the Register. These include all major arms exporting States.
- The vast majority of global transfers of arms in the seven categories are therefore captured in the Register – some say well over 90%.

Governments can report online, at www.un-register.org. All information received from countries is made available on this website. UNODA stands ready to assist Member States in submitting their report. Contact: conventionalarms-unoda@un.org.



All the UN's data on arms transfers are now searchable, and comparable through the *Global Reported Arms Trade* web platform (www.un-register.org).

Using the UN Register in post-conflict situations

The UN Register has been identified as a tool for assessing the military hardware needs of a country coming out of conflict and/or closing in on the end of its arms embargo. UN Security Council expert panels on Côte d'Ivoire and Sudan have each recommended that these countries submit a baseline assessment to the Register of their arms acquisitions and holdings. That would offer a basis for discussion on what weapons systems would be appropriate in the new security situation for the armed forces to import.