

INTERVIEW

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Interview with Ambassador Susanne Baumann \ High-level African Union—Germany conference in Addis Ababa

On 16 October 2015 a high-level African Union—Germany conference on small arms proliferation and PSSM took place in Addis Ababa. The German Deputy Commissioner for Arms Control and Disarmament, Ambassador Susanne Baumann answered BICC's questions.

A high-level African Union—Germany conference on small arms proliferation and PSSM took place in Addis Ababa on 16 October. Who participated in the conference? What were its goals? What did you expect from this conference?

With this conference, we entered uncharted territory in a number of aspects, such as the topic of small arms and light weapons (SALW): Unfortunately, the deadly consequences of the nearly unchecked proliferation of these easy-to-handle weapons to states with weak structures and inherent conflicts are often not fully recognised. In Africa, for instance, the conflicts in Libya and Mali but also the threat of terrorism from groups such as Boko Haram have shown this quite clearly. This is why Germany has decided not only to expand its diplomatic efforts not only to increase awareness of this problem in the International Community but also its financial support to improve the implementation of existing international treaties in the affected countries. Focussing on countries in North Africa and the Sahel region as well as in the Horn of Africa, we intend to enter into a strategic partnership with the African Union (AU).

Together, Germany and the AU had invited to Addis Ababa all of our important strategic partners in Africa—regional organisations as well as states—to jointly elaborate approaches to solving the current situation. This process has already been underway for a number of months. The conference helped to develop clear approaches to a better co-ordination and more efficient measures in the fight against the proliferation of SALW both on the regional and the national level. Donor countries, too, have to make their

strategies and projects transparent and co-ordinate these amongst themselves as in the end, all participants should leave the conference with the feeling that there is a common job to be done in the coming years. The earlier the fragile states of Africa recognise and address their challenges regarding small arms control, the more efficient our help can be in managing these. Germany is ready for this, which is not least shown by its new sustainable development goal 16 that, amongst other things, foresees a “significant reduction of the trade in illegal weapons.”

In the framework of its G7 presidency, Germany has already carried out a number of activities regarding small arms proliferation and PSSM. Its latest event was an expert meeting in Addis Ababa in September. Why is Germany focussing so prominently on this topic?

The topic of small arms proliferation deserves all of our attention. The UN Security Council discussed in detail the most current report by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon this year on the situation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) for good reason. We all know that each year, firearms kill more than 500,000 people worldwide. We have advocated for an early consideration of weapons control, such as in UN peace missions; it can make a difference in the stabilising efforts of states in post-conflict situations. Besides that, there are different, in part complimentary, approaches of how to fight the global proliferation of SALW. One approach of the German government, which it is already supporting with numerous projects, is to reduce the influx of primarily legal weapons from state stockpiles into the black market. A well secured stockpile that only contains weapons registered by the state and that is led by qualified personnel is an important precondition for that. We will already have achieved a lot if those responsible in the political sphere and the military in the region endorse this notion, as without political will in the states affected the best infrastructure is useless. Another important point for us is the effective co-ordination of donors and recipients. We believe that this can help achieve significant synergies. This is why we have used our G7 presidency to

also embed more co-ordination in the group of important donors for arms control. We will continue to work in that direction, also beyond our G7 presidency. Foreign Minister Steinmeier made that very clear in an event organised by the Federal Foreign Office at this year's UN General Assembly where he put the topic in the limelight and called for a global partnership in the fight against small arms proliferation.

Which main actors do you see to improve small arms proliferation and PSSM in the wider Sahel region?

ECOWAS, the regional organisation important for West Africa, already some time ago, adopted far-reaching inter-state rules for dealing with, and the trade in SALW and furthered the foundation of national small arms commissions. These commissions are responsible for co-ordinating national bodies, international organisations and donors. The states of the region are the most important actors for making practical improvements in stockpile management and in the handling of weapons and ammunition as a whole. But the structures within these states differ immensely so that there is no standard recipe for all. In general, in many states there is some reluctance in the co-operation between the civil and military. Yet they are vital to the success of small arms control as both police and the military have the largest stockpiles, and from a technical point of view, the solutions are not that different for both groups. The small arms commissions therefore need a strong mandate and sufficient supply of resources by their governments to be able to translate these different interests into concrete measures. This is also why in the past few years we have been supporting the national commissions and the regional exchange of experiences amongst them in many countries in the region. Then again, the AU is responsible for the entire continent and it is the AU's responsibility to support the regional organisations in their small arms policy and to assure their connectedness to the globally valid UN instruments, such as the Programme of Action on small arms.

What expectations do you have of the EU and other Western industrial nations in this field?

First of all, we want to make every effort to ensure that existing resources are used more effectively for improving small arms control. This means in particular a closer coordination between the large donor states to define the important topics as regards region and content. In the longer term, more donors and funds must be won for this sustained conflict prevention. Having included the topic of weapons proliferation into the already mentioned development goals shows that development and security are connected; a fact we want to make our partners more aware of. This is why we are planning a meeting of the most important donors early next year during which we will discuss our common strategy for the coming years on the basis of the outcomes of the October conference in Addis.