

Date 24 August 2026

**Arms Trade Treaty
Twelfth Conference of States Parties (CSP12)
Statement of the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime
Agenda Item 4: General Debate**

Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime would like to use this intervention to draw attention of States Parties to a challenge that is becoming increasingly difficult for the conventional arms control community to ignore: the rapid proliferation of drones among organized criminal groups and other non-state actors.

Drones are already embedded within criminal markets. In Brazil, the Comando Vermelho has used drones to drop explosives against police. Along the borders of India and Iran, drones are routinely used to move drugs and other illicit commodities. Spanish police have seized uncrewed maritime vessels capable of carrying hundreds of kilograms of narcotics. Mexican criminal groups employ drones for reconnaissance, smuggling and violence, and have also begun developing counter-drone capabilities. In Europe, prosecutors are now warning that organized criminal groups are seeking drones emerging from the war in Ukraine alongside the firearms that have traditionally supplied criminal arsenals.

There is an obvious comparison with the AK-47. Both technologies are relatively cheap, widely available, adaptable and capable of delivering disproportionate effects. The comparison is useful because it reminds us how difficult it has been to control the global proliferation of even a highly identifiable conventional weapon.

Drones present an even greater challenge.

Much of our existing arms control architecture was developed around durable physical objects. A firearm has a manufacturer, a serial number and a component that provides a persistent identity. It can be marked, recorded, transferred, recovered and traced. These principles underpin the ATT, the Programme of Action, the International Tracing Instrument and the Firearms Protocol to the UNTOC.

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A drone may have no equivalent permanent identity. An airframe can be replaced. Flight controllers, communications systems, cameras, processors, payloads and software can be changed independently. A drone assembled for military or criminal use may consist largely of components purchased legally from different commercial suppliers in several countries. Software, firmware and technical knowledge may be as important to its capability as the physical platform itself. This creates a growing problem for an international control system centred on identifiable weapons, physical components and regulated transfers.

For the ATT community, we believe this deserves attention now. The Treaty already provides important principles through national control systems, export risk assessment, regulation of brokering, international cooperation and the prevention of diversion. The question is how those principles should be applied when weaponised drone systems are modular, commercially sourced, digitally enabled and continuously reconfigured.

There is also a direct organized crime dimension. Criminal groups do not need to manufacture sophisticated military systems themselves. They can draw upon global commercial supply chains and employ specialist technicians and online marketplaces, with knowledge transferred from contemporary conflicts. This means that understanding drone proliferation requires us to look beyond the final platform and examine the networks that behind these systems.

Tracing also must evolve to account for the drone as an information ecosystem. Future approaches will need to combine physical, digital and live information (recovered immediately after the seizure). Often the controller can provide a wealth of digital data, and tracing the online mechanisms of use will lead to evidence of supply chains and knowledge transfer. We need to understand the movement of components, expertise and software alongside the movement of complete systems.

We therefore encourage States Parties to begin a structured discussion within the ATT on drones and other modular emerging weapons technologies. That discussion should examine where existing Treaty provisions already provide useful tools, where implementation can be strengthened, and where complementary instruments and forms of international cooperation are required.

The AK-47 became one of the defining proliferation challenges of the twentieth century. Drones may prove to be one of the defining proliferation challenges of this century. The ATT community has an opportunity to engage with that challenge while these technologies and their markets are still evolving.

Thank you.