

The Arms Trade Treaty
Avenue de France 23
CH-1202 Geneva
18 January 2022

To : Representatives of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty.
: Representatives of Signatory States to the Arms Trade Treaty.
: Representatives of Observer States to the Arms Trade Treaty.
: Representatives of International and Regional Organizations.
: Representatives of Civil Society, NGOs and Industry.

Dear Distinguished Representatives,

BACKGROUND PAPER: OPTIONS FOR THE FORMAT OF FIRST SERIES OF MEETINGS FOR THE EIGHTH CONFERENCE OF STATES PARTIES

INTRODUCTION

1. On 22 November 2021, I announced dates and venues of the Working Group and informal preparatory meetings for the CSP8 cycle, as well as CSP8 itself. I also indicated that the intention was to hold the meetings in-person in Geneva, but that the format of the meetings may be subject to change as the situation regarding the COVID-19 outbreak evolves. I undertook to review the situation early in the new year and confirm the venue and format of the first series of meetings scheduled for 15-18 February 2022 by the end of January.
2. As promised, the Presidency and the ATT Secretariat have been closely monitoring the situation with respect to the Swiss Government's restrictions on the holding of meetings and the measures that have been adopted that will (likely) govern our meeting. In terms of travel to Switzerland for the meeting, there are currently no countries on Switzerland's [list of countries with variants of concern](#), meaning no person attending the meeting would be required to quarantine for a period of time because of the country they are travelling from. However, there are rules concerning requirements for proof of vaccination, recent recovery from COVID and/or a negative PCR test affecting [entry into Switzerland](#), which may change at any time.
3. In addition, on 03 November 2021, the Swiss Government (Federal Council) introduced a "[Swiss Covid certificate](#)", which is now required to enter indoor facilities including bars and restaurants (but not international conferences, for now). There is also a requirement to wear face masks in indoor facilities accessible to the public even when a Covid certificate is required.
4. The measures in place regarding entry into Switzerland and the holding of indoor events do not prohibit the holding of the February meetings in person. However, in addition to the COVID-19 situation and response measures in Switzerland, travel restrictions imposed by some governments around the world, the emergence and transmissibility of new variants of the virus and the state of the vaccination roll-out across the globe, reinforce the conclusion that not all delegates will be able or willing to attend an in-person meeting in February at the International Conference Center Geneva (CICG).

5. Accordingly, the ATT community must consider an alternative format for the February meetings that best serves the objectives of the meetings. I have prepared this background paper, with the assistance of the ATT Secretariat, in an effort to outline the options that are available to us in the current circumstances with respect to the format of the February meetings and to inform stakeholders of the process I intend to adopt to reach agreement on the format of the meeting.

6. The first part of this paper provides an overview of the timeline for determining the format of the February meetings, and the second part outlines the options that are available to us with respect to the format of the February meetings.

PART 1. TIMELINE FOR DETERMINING THE FORMAT OF THE FEBRUARY MEETINGS

7. Following the circulation of this background paper to all ATT stakeholders, I have requested the vice-Presidents to hold consultations with their regional groups on the draft options outlined below to gauge their views and preferences. I will then hold a virtual meeting with all ATT Office Holders to give the vice-Presidents an opportunity to share feedback from their consultations and discuss and agree the proposed format of the February meetings. Thereafter, I will announce the outcome of the vice-Presidents' meeting with States Parties.

Timeline

8. In summary, the timeline of steps towards agreeing on the proposed format of the February meetings is as follows:

18 January	Circulate the options paper to all ATT stakeholders for their information
19 – 25 January	vice-Presidents to hold consultations with their regional groups on the draft options paper to gauge their views and preferences Other stakeholders invited to submit written comments on the draft options paper to the President via the ATT Secretariat, (by 25 January) to gauge their views and preferences
26 January	Virtual meeting of all ATT Office Holders to hear feedback from the vice-Presidents on their consultations and to discuss and agree the proposed format of the February meetings
27 January	Announce the outcome of the vice-Presidents' consultations and the format of the February meetings

9. Through this process, I hope to be in a position to communicate the format of the February meetings by 27 January 2022.

PART 2. OPTIONS FOR THE FORMAT OF THE FEBRUARY MEETINGS

10. As I noted above, the measures in place in response to COVID, the emergence of new variants as well as the current health and travel restrictions adopted by some states rule out the possibility of all delegates being able or willing to attend a face-to-face meeting from 15-18 February.

11. Some of the other restrictions and limitations that we need to take into account in discussing options for the format of the February meetings include, geographical time differences and the status of telecommunication infrastructure and capabilities in many states, particularly the developing world.

12. In this context, the following two options for the February meetings exist:
- a. Hybrid meeting (i.e., a limited number of delegates physically present at the conference venue (CICG) with other delegates participating virtually).
 - b. Virtual meeting (i.e. video conference held live via e.g., Zoom).

13. The ATT Secretariat has determined that any costs incurred by the ATT Secretariat associated with holding the February meetings by any of the formats listed above and discussed in detail below can be covered by the funds allocated to or earmarked for the February meetings.

Option 1: Hybrid meeting

14. This option will entail a limited number of delegates physically present at the conference venue (CICG), with other delegates participating virtually. In assessing the feasibility of this option, the following factors are relevant:

Delegation sizes

15. At present, up to 1,000 persons can attend meetings and conferences in Geneva (provided that social distancing of 1.5 metres and other sanitary measures are implemented). Accordingly, unless this figure changes, based on the size of the venue at CICG, each delegation could be permitted two seats.

Remote Participation

16. This option involves the active participation of delegates remotely by way of making live interventions. This entails a two-way communication process between Geneva and different parts of the world where delegates will be participating from. CICG can capture, prepare and make available data content/feed for the conference proceedings, at its own cost, as was demonstrated during the virtual CSP7 preparatory meetings held in April 2021 as well as CSP7 itself held in August 2021.

Interpretation

17. The company contracted by the ATT Secretariat to provide interpretation services to ATT meetings, Intercongress, successfully provided interpretation services in all UN languages via the Zoom platform to the CSP7 preparatory meetings held in April 2021 as well as CSP7 itself held in August 2021.

18. The costs of interpretation via Zoom will be covered by the CSP8 interpretation services' budget. Intercongress has advised that participants planning to make interventions are advised to use headsets with microphones to enhance the sound quality for the interpreters and to ensure the quality of the interpretation.

Social distancing and hygiene requirements

19. The ATT Secretariat has consulted with CICG on this issue, and CICG has confirmed that it is able to provide conference facilities that comply with social distancing and hygiene requirements. To that end, CICG will arrange the conference room in accordance with social distancing requirements. Each delegate will have a dedicated table and microphone. In so far as hygiene requirements are concerned, CICG will, in addition to the already existing bathroom facilities, position hand sanitizers at different parts of the conference facility.

Meeting times

20. The hybrid meeting would necessitate an adjustment of time to accommodate all regions to some extent. For example, the CSP7 preparatory meetings held in April 2021 ran from 12:00 to 15:00 (Geneva local time), while the CSP7 sessions in August 2021 ran from 13:00 – 16:00 (Geneva local time).

Agenda for the meeting

21. The agenda for the February meetings will need to be adapted to the reduced time allocated to the meeting (as discussed above). The number of items on the agenda or the time allocated to each item will need to be reduced. A similar approach was adopted for the CSP7 preparatory meetings held in April 2021, where the time allocated to the CSP7 Informal Preparatory Meeting was reduced from the usual six hours to three hours and the agenda was adapted accordingly.

Option 2: Virtual meeting

22. This option entails all delegates participating in the meetings remotely. In assessing the feasibility of this option, the following factors are relevant:

Remote Participation

23. This option involves the active participation of delegates remotely by way of making live interventions. This entails a two-way communication process between Geneva and different parts of the world where delegates will be participating from. CICG can capture, prepare and make available data content/feed for the conference proceedings, at its own cost, and this can be achieved via the Zoom platform, as was demonstrated during the virtual CSP7 preparatory meetings held in April 2021.

Interpretation

24. The company contracted by the ATT Secretariat to provide interpretation services to ATT meetings, Intercongress, successfully provided interpretation services in all UN languages via the Zoom platform to the CSP7 preparatory meetings held in April 2021.

25. The costs of interpretation via Zoom will be covered by the CSP8 interpretation services' budget. Intercongress has advised that participants planning to make interventions are advised to use headsets with microphones to enhance the sound quality for the interpreters and to ensure the quality of the interpretation.

Meeting times

26. The virtual meeting would necessitate an adjustment of time to accommodate all regions to some extent. For example, the CSP7 preparatory meetings held in April 2021 ran from 12:00 to 15:00 (Geneva local time), while the CSP7 sessions in August 2021 ran from 13:00 – 16:00 (Geneva local time).

Agenda for the meeting

27. The agenda for the meeting will need to be adapted to the reduced time allocated to the meeting (as discussed above). The number of items on the agenda or the time allocated to each item will need to be reduced. A similar approach was adopted for the CSP7 preparatory meetings held in April 2021, where the time allocated to sessions was reduced from the usual six hours to three hours and the agenda was adapted accordingly.

CONCLUSION

28. In my view, the holding of CSP7 in August 2021 as a hybrid meeting, with some delegates attending the Conference in person and others participating via the Zoom platform, was a success and gave us a unique opportunity to trial the use of this format for a large meeting of our stakeholders. Informed by the success of this meeting, – as well as some of the lessons learned, my inclination is that we consider conducting the February meetings as in hybrid format (option 1) meeting to ensure the maximum participation and broadest engagement possible in the circumstances.

29. Of course, I am open to other suggestions and proposals for the format of the meetings, which is why I am conducting consultations on the matter. I am conveying my personal views at this early stage merely to express my preferences in a transparent manner, without wishing to pre-empt the outcome of the consultations that will take place.

30. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your support and patience as we continue to navigate through the challenges posed by the COVID pandemic, and I look forward to engaging with you in the first series of CSP8 meetings in February.

31. I avail myself of this opportunity to renew the assurance of my highest consideration.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Thomas Göbel', is written over a faint, light blue circular watermark or stamp.

Ambassador Thomas GÖBEL

President: Eighth Conference of States Parties to the ATT