

XVII Conference of Ministers of Defence of the Americas

Delivered by Greta Zeender, Head of External Relations, GICHD

Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished representatives,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a privilege to address you today on behalf of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining and its Ammunition Management Advisory Team (AMAT).

Let me tell you a bit more about the GICHD.

The GICHD was established in Geneva in 1998 by the Swiss Government.

We help governments and their partners develop the systems that make mine action effective and sustainable.

We also work to ensure that ammunition is managed safely and securely throughout its life cycle.

At its core, this is preventive work. It is about helping States reduce risks before they become crises, and ensuring they are better prepared to respond when incidents occur.

Why is conventional ammunition management important for the Americas?

The safety and security risks linked to unsafely and insecurely managed ammunition across the region are considerable.

Globally, accidental explosions at ammunition storage areas have claimed lives and imposed major humanitarian, security, economic and political costs.

According to the Small Arms Survey, between January 1979 and December 2024, at least 674 such incidents were recorded worldwide, resulting in more than 31,000 casualties.

The Americas have not been spared. During the same period, at least 63 incidents were recorded across the region, affecting 18 countries and causing at least 1,500 casualties.

The causes of these explosions are instructive: Many incidents are linked to improper stockpile management practices.

Strengthening ammunition management is therefore not only a matter of preventing accidents; it is also critical to reducing diversion.

Across Latin America and the Caribbean, illicit firearms and ammunition continue to fuel organised crime, gang violence, drug trafficking and armed violence.

The evidence points to several sources of illicit ammunition: cross-border trafficking, diversion from legal civilian and commercial markets, local leakage, and, in some cases, theft or diversion from national stockpiles held by defence and security agencies.

While state stockpiles are not the main source of illicit ammunition in the region, any weakness in the control of State-held ammunition can create opportunities for loss, theft or diversion.

The safety and security threat is also evolving.

The illicit circulation of ammunition, explosives, detonators, chemical precursors and other components is also enabling the production and use of improvised explosive devices.

In parts of the region, IEDs are being used by organised crime groups and armed groups for territorial violence and control, attacks against security forces, for illegal mining and intimidation of communities.

So what is the response?

The response is safe, secure and sustainable through-life conventional ammunition management.

This is the approach set out in the Global Framework for Through-Life Conventional Ammunition Management, adopted by States at the United Nations.

The Global Framework provides 15 objectives and 85 practical measures to help States address the safety and security risks posed by conventional ammunition.

It stresses the importance of national ownership, needs-driven approaches, and regional and sub-regional mechanisms.

This is particularly relevant for Latin America and the Caribbean.

The region already has important political frameworks to build on: CIFTA, the Caribbean Firearms Roadmap, the Central American Roadmap, and the emerging Andean Roadmap.

The Global Framework can help translate these commitments into practical, concrete national action.

But what does implementation of the Global Framework and regional instruments look like in practice?

This is where AMAT can support.

AMAT was established in 2019 as a joint initiative of the GICHD and the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs.

It supports the UN SaferGuard Programme, contributes to the development and dissemination of the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines, and supports the implementation of the Global Framework.

Funded by the government of Austria, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, UK, and US, as well as financial support from the EU and NATO, AMAT works with States, upon request, to identify needs, assess risks, strengthen institutional capacity, align national systems with international good practice, and support sustainable national ownership.

Since its establishment in 2019, AMAT has worked in more than 22 States, with sustained support in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Jordan, Moldova, Peru, Ukraine and Sierra Leone, and is working to respond to requests recent requests from Colombia, Cyprus, Benin, Syria and the United Arab Emirates.

Our partnership with Peru offers a strong example of the type of comprehensive capacity-building approach we can provide.

With support from the United States Department of State , Since 2021 AMAT has been working with the Peruvian Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces to create a stronger, more coherent and sustainable national ammunition management system. It has included a range of activities:

First, providing advice to the Ministry of Defence in the development of the Strategic Plan for the Management of Arms, Ammunition and Explosives in the Defence Sector.

Second, training the Armed Forces on the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines, and then applying a train-the-trainers approach, so that expertise remains within the Armed Forces.

Third, carrying out safety and security assessments of ammunition storage areas, equipping national authorities to identify risks so that they can prioritise corrective measures.

And fourth, supporting the review of national regulations, procedures and standards, to strengthen coherence across the defence sector and align national practice with international good practice.

This approach is relevant beyond Peru for the broader Americas region.

AMAT has recently received a request from Colombia for support in strengthening ammunition management capacities.

We welcome this request and look forward to working with the Colombian Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces, as well as with regional and international partners, to better understand the needs, identify where AMAT can add value, and support nationally owned priorities in a coordinated and sustainable manner.

More broadly, AMAT stands ready to support States in the region that wish to strengthen their national ammunition management systems.

This support can include voluntary assessments, technical advice, training, regulatory review, inventory and surveillance support, risk reduction, contingency planning, and support to regional cooperation and implementation of the Global Framework.

Thank you.