

## Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) Intercepts about 200,000 live Ammunition in Niger State, Nigeria

### BACKGROUND



- Niger State has a population of 3,954,772 people (2006 population census). The State share borders with Zamfara, Kebbi, Kogi, Kwara, Kaduna States and Abuja-FCT and an international boundary with the Republic of Benin. The Republic of Benin serves as a major trading route for contrabands into Nigeria and also characterized by cross-border crime including human trafficking, arms/drug smuggling.
- The proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and the uncontrolled spread in the hands of unauthorized persons is reflected through the prevalence of organized crimes and violence in Nigeria, resulting in humanitarian and socio-economic consequences.
- These weapons are obtained from several identified sources: local production; stolen from official Government armory during attacks on security outpost; and trafficked to the country through numerous porous borders Nigeria shares with her neighbours especially along the Sahel belt noted for criminality. The Nigerian Government in its 2013 report on illegal immigration/porous borders identified 1,487 illegal land routes<sup>1</sup>.
- Between March 10 and September 19, 2017, WANEP recorded a cumulative total of 2,686 weapons seized at the Lagos Apapa Port, Lagos State. 661 Pump Action Rifles (PAR) seized on March 10; 440 PAR seized on May 23; 1100 PAR seized on September 11 with 475 PAR seized on September 19 respectively<sup>2</sup>.
- In a recent development, the Nigerian Army on May 30, 2018, intercepted three trucks loaded with arms and ammunitions in Balogun Village, Yewa-North LGA of Ogun State with 300,000 cartridges recovered. The ammunition was allegedly smuggled into Nigeria through neighbouring Benin Republic<sup>3</sup>.

### INCIDENT PROFILE

On July 9, 2018, Officials of the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) intercepted a truck loaded with ammunition along Wawa-Babana border in Niger State with about 200,000 cartridges recovered and two suspects arrested. The ammunition was reportedly smuggled into Nigeria from Benin Republic. Preliminary investigations also reveal that the suspects intended smuggling the cartridges to the South-East Region of Nigeria<sup>4</sup>.

Similarly, the NCS also intercepted ammunitions at the Tin Can Island Port in Lagos State on the 9 and 10 July, 2018 comprising, 150 rounds of live ammunition and 28 pieces of various sizes of jack knives, 149 rounds of 38mm caliber live ammunition, 92 rounds of 9mm caliber live ammunition, two rounds of 7.62mm caliber live ammunition, 11 cartridges of live ammunition, 12 expended empty shells of various calibers and one empty magazine<sup>5</sup>.



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## **RISK ANALYSIS:**

Nigerians are concerned about security of the country. With the increasing deadly campaigns of Boko Haram, the farmer-herder violence and other forms of armed attacks, the country security situation remains fragile. The devastating impact of the attacks are made possible due to the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) in the country and the West African Region at large. In 2016, the United Nations Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC) estimates that of the 500 million firearms in the West Africa Region, about 350 million of those illegal weapons are in Nigeria<sup>6</sup>. The availability of these weapons have fuelled incidences of religious/ethnic crisis, terrorism, farmer-herder conflicts, communal clashes, banditry/cattle rustling, militancy, cultism/political thuggery, kidnapping and armed robbery, in which thousands of lives have been lost. The threat and use of SALWs further impedes the delivery of economic and humanitarian<sup>7</sup> support to communities in conflict.

The recent interception of weapons around the country is worrisome, especially as the nation prepares for General elections in 2019. The increase circulation of SALWs has implications for voter apathy for fear of plausible armed attacks during the elections, particularly in the Northern Region of the country

In February 2018, the Inspector General of Police directed all State Police Commands to commence disarmament and recovery of prohibited firearms and ammunition across States<sup>8</sup>. The operation to mop-up illicit weapons and reduce the impact of armed violence is still on going, despite the initial 21-days ultimatum issued in accordance with the Provisions of Prohibited Firearms Act 2004 under the 1999 Nigerian Constitution.

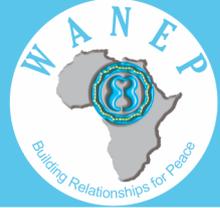
Despite the impressive recovery of weapons in States and the demilitarization of armed groups, the alarming rate of armed attacks and violent conflicts in Nigeria underscores the need for concerted efforts towards prevention and eradication of illicit SALWs.

## **MECHANISMS FOR INTERVENTIONS**

- The seized ammunitions currently at the Enforcement Unit of the Nigeria Customs Service pending further investigation in trail of other suspects.
- The “Presidential Committee on SALWs” (PRESCOM) formed in 2013<sup>9</sup>, and the availability of several Regional and International instruments such as the United Nations Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), Firearms Protocol, and United Nations Programme of Action on Illicit Trade in SALW.
- The establishment of a National Commission (NATCOMS) on SALWs in Nigeria towards stemming the tide of the proliferation of SALW in Nigeria<sup>10</sup>. This is in line with the ‘ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, their Ammunition and other Related Materials (2006) and for Related Matters’ for regulating SALWs.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The NCS should increase its vigilance and scrutiny of all imported cargoes into the country to ensure that they do not contain arms and other prohibited items. And more importantly, it should strengthen its investigation and prosecutorial functions so that persons or organisations that breach the laws of the land on the importation of banned



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items are promptly brought to justice. Specifically, the NCS must speedily identify and prosecute those behind the cache of arms seized. This is imperative so that the sanctions meted out to the criminals can serve as a deterrent to potential importers of prohibited arms into the country;

- The need for improved collaboration between various agencies in Nigeria and neighbouring countries responsible for border management (land and sea ports) is crucial to checkmating the influx of illicit SALWs, illegal movements and other prohibited items that undermine peaceful relations in the region. This should be supported with the provision of operational vehicles and improved technology to track and monitor the circulation of weapons. This supports the **2030 agenda on “Sustainable Development Goals- 16:4”** on **“significantly reduced illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime”**;
- The Federal Government and State Governments to strengthen community policing to complement the efforts of security agencies in combating the movement and increase of SALWs and identification of illegal gun factories across communities.
- The whistle-blower policy inaugurated by the Federal Government in the recovery of looted funds and recently extended to mopping up of illegal weapons is commendable, as this would facilitate inflow of information of illicit activities and imports into the country.

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**“PRESCOM is not a security agency but a focal agent of government with mandate to evolve a National Action Plan for controlling the incidence of SALW proliferation in the country and to ensure compliance with International and Regional Standards of SALW”.**
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