

The Wassenaar Arrangement (WA), the first global multilateral arrangement on export controls for conventional weapons and sensitive dual-use goods and technologies, received final approval by 33 co-founding countries in July 1996 and began operations in September 1996.

The WA was designed to promote transparency, exchange of views and information and greater responsibility in transfers of conventional arms and dual-use goods and technologies, thus preventing destabilising accumulations. It complements and reinforces, without duplication, the existing regimes for non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems, by focusing on the threats to international and regional peace and security which may arise from transfers of armaments and sensitive dual-use goods and technologies where the risks are judged greatest. This arrangement is also intended to enhance co-operation to prevent the acquisition of armaments and sensitive dual-use items for military end-uses, if the situation in a region or the behaviour of a state is, or becomes, a cause for serious concern to the Participating States.

The Participating States seek through their national policies to ensure that transfers of arms and dual-use goods and technologies do not contribute to the development or enhancement of military capabilities that undermine international and regional security and stability and are not diverted to support such capabilities. The Arrangement does not impede bona fide civil transactions and is not directed against any state or group of states. All measures undertaken with respect to the Arrangement are in accordance with member countries' national legislation and policies and implemented on the basis of national discretion.

The WA countries maintain effective export controls for the items on the agreed lists, which are reviewed periodically to take into account technological developments and experience gained. Through transparency and exchange of views and information, suppliers of arms and dual-use items can develop common understandings of the risks associated with their transfer and assess the scope for coordinating national control policies to combat these risks.

The Arrangement's specific information exchange requirements involve semi-annual notifications of arms transfers, currently covering seven categories derived from the UN Register of Conventional Arms. Members are also required to report transfers or denials of transfers of certain controlled dual-use items. Denial reporting helps to bring to the attention of members the transfers that may undermine the objectives of the Arrangement.

Information exchanged in the Arrangement can also include any other matters relevant to the WA goals that individual Participating States wish to bring to the attention of other members.

Participating States meet on a regular basis in Vienna, where the Arrangement has established its headquarters and a small Secretariat. Decisions are made by consensus.

The Arrangement is open on a global and non-discriminatory basis to prospective adherents that comply with the agreed criteria. To be admitted, a state must: be a producer/exporter of arms or industrial equipment respectively; maintain non-proliferation policies and appropriate national policies, including adherence to relevant non-proliferation regimes and treaties; and maintain fully effective export controls. Although the Arrangement does not have an observer category, a diverse outreach policy is envisaged in order to inform non-member countries about the WA objectives and activities and to encourage non-members to adopt national policies consistent with the objectives of greater transparency and responsibility in transfers of conventional arms and dual-use goods and technologies, maintain fully effective export controls and adhere to relevant non-proliferation treaties and regimes.