

IANSA plays pivotal role at UN Small Arms Conference

Rebecca Peters / IANSA Director

Two months after the Biennial Meeting of States at the United Nations in New York, the IANSA Secretariat is still receiving positive feedback on the pivotal role NGOs played in the success of the conference. Over 170 NGOs applied for accreditation and we calculate that around 280 individual NGO representatives took part in the meeting. This number would have been even higher, but problems obtaining US visas prevented quite a few of our NGO colleagues from attending.

In addition to the tremendous efforts made by IANSA participants before the conference, the week of 7-11 July at the UN provided us with a great opportunity to display our work in a series of sub-meetings, panels, workshops and exhibits. IANSA coordinated both the presence and activities of civil society at the meeting.

Activities included a week-long series of policy and information briefings for delegates, UN officials and NGO colleagues on a variety of topics. All were thought-provoking, well attended and extremely well received by governments and UN officials. Notes from these sessions are available on the IANSA website in the BMS section.

A highlight was the launch of the IANSA report *Implementing the Programme of Action 2003: Action by States & Civil Society* (see page 3), which reveals that most governments have not taken even basic steps towards implementation of the Programme of Action (PoA). As the only written assessment of the PoA available at the BMS, our report was in great demand – over 1000 copies were distributed to government delegates, UN officials and NGOs. In addition to the report, the NGO presentations to the main plenary meeting directly addressed the assembly on the impact of small arms on the daily lives of civilians around the world. IANSA members from Trinidad, Sri Lanka, Costa Rica, Cameroon, Cambodia, Armenia, Kenya and Jordan spoke for the millions



IANSA's graphic makes the point with the BMS delegates

of victims of small arms violence around the world. The closing presentation was met with spontaneous applause from the assembled delegates, very unusual in the formal atmosphere of the UN Plenary. IANSA and civil society were specifically praised by a number of governments, including Mexico and Canada who called for greater civil society involvement in helping implement and monitor Programme of Action activities. (See pages 2 and 3)

IANSA also held a meeting towards the end of the week to discuss strategic planning and governance, attended by participants from all regions. The documents relating to this meeting can be found on the IANSA website at www.iansa.org/about.htm. Feedback was excellent, both on the briefings held and on the breadth and diversity of the printed materials offered by NGO. In the words of one senior UN official, 'NGOs proved to everyone at the conference that they are the experts on this issue, and there can be no doubt in anyone's mind as to the central role that NGOs play in tackling the scourge of SALW and the need for collaboration with them at every level.'

All of these aspects of our participation in the Biennial Meeting clearly led to more

engaged government participation, UN interest and extensive news coverage of the meeting. We plan to build on this as we work to support and speed up implementation of the PoA around the world leading up to the 2005 and 2006 conferences.

Two very positive outcomes of the conference were the binding instrument on marking and tracing proposed by the UN Group of Experts and the EU statement on brokering. However many states have still not properly acknowledged either the links between legal and illegal markets, nor the links between domestic and international regulation. Global legal standards that would keep small arms away from human rights abusers still seem far away.

Now, IANSA is working towards the launch of the Oxfam-Amnesty-IANSA "Control Arms" campaign on 9 October and looking at how best to maximise the opportunities available to us between now and 2005. The BMS, primarily intended to evaluate what had and had not been done since 2001, ended on a forward-looking and optimistic note. We will capitalise on this as we continue to work towards ending the proliferation and misuse of small arms worldwide.