

# A South Asian Report on the PoA and the BMS

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**A**lthough India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are committed to setting up National Commissions on Small Arms, South Asian governments in general have not given priority to the implementation of the UN Programme of Action. A number of explanations have been offered for their inactivity:

- There is increasing criminalisation of politics; guns are often used to intimidate political opponents and voters during elections.
- Both the ruling and opposition parties in many countries have access to illegal guns and patronise underworld and criminal syndicates.
- Several members of parliament in South Asia have not surrendered their arms to the government and still hold unlicensed arms.

However, modest steps have been taken. Maldives and Bangladesh have already appointed their national focal points. Whereas in 2001 India followed the conservative US line restricting the scope of the PoA, at the BMS in 2003 India presented a suggestion that export to non-state actors must be addressed. This was the opinion of most states, especially from Africa, who were disappointed in 2001 that there was no ban on exports to non-state actors. Also, Pakistan extended its support to efforts to develop an international instrument on marking and tracing of SALW.

The BMS could not consider new issues outside the purview of the Programme of Action, whose implementation alone was under review. But there will be scope for new policy discussions at the 2006 Review Conference.

## Informal Meeting with Civil Society

On the second day of the UN conference, South Asia Partnership International organised an informal meeting for all the South Asian government delegations. Representatives from the governments

of India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka attended. It was a positive discussion and we hope that through such cooperation there will be an inter-government meeting on small arms prior to the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Summit.

South Asian civil society groups are aiming for a regional convention on small arms which can effectively prevent and control proliferation in the region. Other regions already have moved forward with the involvement of civil society, leading to agreements from the OAS, EU and African Union. In South Asia, SAARC has been unable to address security concerns in the fear that it may lead to bilateral wrangles. SAARC has not addressed contentious issues according to H.E. Q.A.M.A. Rahim, Secretary General of SAARC. According to Rahim, SAARC is planning to set up SAARC-Pol – similar to Interpol – with a mandate from the 12th SAARC Summit in January 2004 in Islamabad. This could possibly address issues related to crime.

In South Asia, as elsewhere, excess availability of arms to the government, and the cheap and easy availability of arms to non-state actors, impedes the peaceful resolution of conflicts and undermines security, freedom of expression and promotes forced migration. This proliferation of arms exists due to poor governance and management of law and order as well as the inability of governments to address security sector reforms. Governments and civil society need to work together to implement the UN Programme of Action on small arms.

The South Asia Partnership International also released a new book at the BMS, entitled “Small Arms Proliferation A Big Problem - A Comparative Study on Small Arms Legislation in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.” The report is the first of its kind and can be used as a reference guide for workers in all areas of development work. More information: sap-int@eureka.lk

# NGO reactions to the BMS

**“I got a global perspective on small arms for the first time.”**

**“States were more concerned with proving that they were ‘not guilty’ than in looking for genuine solutions.”**

**“I got a glimpse of the status of the report of [my regional] governments which gave me more courage to hold them accountable to the UN PoA implementation which will form much of my campaign work in the next six months.”**

**“I had a detailed conversation with my government as well as delegates from neighbouring countries. The discussion was free and frank.”**

**“[As a result of attending the BMS my government] will strengthen links between small arms and grassroots communities.”**

**“I was encouraged to see that there were many who live and work in ‘safe’ countries that were genuinely concerned for the rest of us.”**

**“As a result [of meeting delegates from my country] it was decided to organize an international conference on SALW stockpile management and destruction in October.”**

**“[For the first time, my government] invited the NGOs [from my country] to a joint brain-storming meeting at the Permanent Mission.”**

**“The IANSA Women’s Network was an extremely impressive crew who combined leadership and participatory democracy in their working style.”**