

Getting the Small Arms Process Back on Track
NGO presentation to the 62nd General Assembly First Committee
Rebecca Peters, IANSA Director

26 October 2007

Thank you Mr Chair, and thank you again for inviting civil society to be part of the First Committee's deliberations.

In 2001, here in Conference Room 4, Member states created the UN Program of Action on Small Arms, the first attempt at a comprehensive global agreement to reduce gun trafficking and gun violence. At the time this was recognised as an important achievement, but with hindsight it has become clear what a truly enormous breakthrough it was.

Mr Chair, I was critical of the PoA in 2001 because of its shortcomings and omissions. However, I am happy to admit that the agreement has proved more powerful, and many Member States have proved more resourceful in implementation, than I had expected.

Progress so far

We have seen some significant achievements so far. For example,

- 135 countries have submitted at least one annual report on implementing the PoA, and some 74 countries now have formal National Commissions to address the problem
- Through thematic and regional meetings, we have gained a better understanding of the responsibilities we share under the PoA.
- The international community clearly recognises that addressing the proliferation and misuse of small arms is of fundamental importance for human security.

Nevertheless, over the first 5 years some aspects of the PoA that need improvement have emerged. Last year's Review Conference was our opportunity to address those and to outline a plan for the next 5 years. Unfortunately, as we all know, the RevCon failed to realise that opportunity.

And now here we are at the beginning of the next phase of the small arms process.

Omnibus and small arms process

The damage done by the failure of the RevCon last year was only partly repaired at the 61st General Assembly. The 2006 GA voted to hold a Biennial Meeting of States in 2008, to the great relief of everyone. However, the GA did not reinstate the small arms process itself as a long-term commitment. Reinstating the *process* would have meant deciding to continue the pattern of reporting meetings every two years, and also to hold a Review Conference every so often, allowing the opportunity to improve and develop the PoA.

We are disappointed that this year's omnibus Resolution on small arms does not contain a commitment to hold regular review conferences as part of the small arms process. The General Assembly should make that commitment so that the small arms process will be more than a series of ad hoc meetings.

The BMS

The conversation is under way about how to make the 2008 Biennial Meeting of States more productive and efficient than previous versions. IANSA would like to suggest a couple of improvements which we saw at the international meeting on small arms transfers, which was held in Geneva in August.

Admittedly it was not an official UN meeting – it was an informal meeting sponsored by Canada and Switzerland – but it was run and structured in a manner very similar to a UN small arms meeting.

1. **The format was dynamic** – with very few formal speeches, and consisting mainly of discussion and debate
2. The format for **NGO participation was effective and productive**. During the last half hour of each morning or afternoon session, after all the states had made their interventions, the Chair called on NGOs to make one or two comments or questions. Thus the NGO contributions were timely and relevant to the discussion under way, frequently sparking further comments or questions from states. This was in contrast to the traditional format for NGO participation in the UN small arms meetings, which takes the form of one 3-hour block of presentations toward the end of the week, without opportunity for interaction. States and civil society both found the Geneva model to be a productive way for NGOs to contribute to the discussion, and we would like to propose that a similar format be adopted for NGO participation at next year's BMS.
3. The **opportunity to focus** on one aspect of the Program of Action. During the course of the week there was a noticeable steady increase in the participants' understanding of the topic under discussion, and in their confidence. We believe this will pay off at the BMS next year, when the discussion of international transfer controls will be of higher quality and efficiency, because much of the basic discussion has already taken place. We believe other aspects of the PoA would also benefit from discussion and development at this type of '**intersessional**' meeting,

The next intersessional style meeting could be on the topic of **increasing cooperation and assistance**. This was suggested by some states in Geneva

Implementation of the Program of Action is massively under-funded. Excluding DDR, some \$200 million has been spent worldwide on implementing the PoA since 2001. This is 50% less than the amount spent per year on action against landmines (\$332 million per year). The value of cooperation is stressed in OP10-13 of this year's 2007 resolution on small arms.

Mr Chair, I started by mentioning some of the progress that has been made in the UN small arms process. Of course, the only progress that really matters is a reduction in gun violence – If lives are saved, injuries prevented, and if individuals and communities are able to go about their lives without fear of being threatened or injured at gunpoint.

Brazil

In this regard I am thrilled to report to the First committee some brilliant news from Brazil. The Ministry of Health has released the latest data, showing a dramatic drop in firearm mortality in that country since the introduction of comprehensive reforms in 2003.

Gun deaths in Brazil had been rising steadily for 15 years, but after the new law the pattern changed to a downward trend. The data show that **around 24,000 lives have been saved** in the 3 years 2003-2006.

This has been achieved by a comprehensive program of preventative measures –

- stronger legislation including tougher licensing requirements and a ban on carrying guns
- establishment of a central computerised firearms register
- a firearm buyback program that destroyed 460,000 weapons
- extensive public awareness program
- security sector reform

Of critical importance, this program involved extensive and intensive cooperation between government and civil society in Brazil.

Mr Chair, IANSA congratulates Brazil on this fantastic achievement, which is an example of an effective approach to the small arms problem – multi dimensional, sustained, and involving all sectors of society. We hope that other countries may follow the example to reduce death and injury from small arms around the world.

Thank you