

## **IANSA position paper: Gender-specific action to prevent small arms violence\***

The proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons exacerbates inequality between women and men and girls and boys and contributes to gender-based violence in countries all over the world, whether war affected, recovering from violent conflict or at 'peace'. Women, men, girls, and boys play a variety of roles in resisting, perpetrating, supporting and addressing the human cost of armed violence. The next phase of global policy-making on small arms requires greater recognition of these multiple roles and the differential impacts of armed violence on females and males, old and young. Considerable evidence and information has been generated since 2001 to assist policy makers with this work.

Men, particularly young men, constitute the vast majority of those who use and are killed or injured by small arms and light weapons. The World Health Organisation estimates that 90% of gun homicide victims are men and boys. However, large numbers of women and girls also suffer directly and indirectly from armed violence. A lack of respect for women and inconsistent legal protection renders them acutely vulnerable to sexual violence at the barrel of a gun in a variety of contexts: war zones and peaceful nations; public places and in the home. Intimate partner violence is more likely to be lethal when a firearm is present in the home, increasing the risk of death by 12 times compared to other means of violence.

Guns also affect women and girls when they are not directly in the firing line. They are disproportionately affected by the damage to health, education and other social infrastructures caused by armed violence. Women often become the main breadwinners and primary carers when male relatives are killed, injured or disabled by gun violence. Displacement due to violent conflict leaves them particularly vulnerable to starvation and disease as they struggle to fend for their families.

### **How does the Programme of Action (PoA) address the problem?**

The PoA contains only one reference to gender, in paragraph 6 of the Preamble where States express grave concern about the devastating consequences of the illicit trade in small arms for children 'as well as the negative impact on women and the elderly'.

### **Progress since 2001**

There is growing recognition that more accurate gender analysis leads to more effective disarmament initiatives, weapons control processes and violence reduction in general. Appreciation of gender dimensions has consequences for the way awareness is raised; design and funding of interventions; monitoring and evaluation of weapons control programs; and in formulating long-term strategies to combat the global small arms crisis.

However, recognition of human perspectives and particularly gender considerations for the effective implementation of small arms control policy and practice remains weak within the UN small arms process. There are very few references to gender in country statements on implementation of the PoA; for example, less than 8% of States included language on gender in their 2003 reports. Women continue to be misrepresented as the largest number of victims of armed violence, while women's diverse disarmament, violence reduction and security related activities are marginalised and receive little or no support. Women's security work is usually referred to in passing, and women's activism to resist armed violence is lost. Because the language of 'vulnerability' prevails, it remains possible to portray women as being exactly like

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\* For reasons of style only, the terms 'weapons', 'small arms' and 'firearms' are used interchangeably in this paper. All these terms more properly refer to 'small arms and light weapons (SALW)'. These are weapons that can be carried and used by one or two people, including handguns, assault rifles, machine guns, grenade launchers, anti-tank or anti-aircraft guns and light mortars. Light weapons, ammunition, grenades, landmines, and explosives are also part of this category.

children and the elderly, hapless victims of prolific weapons, rather than a key resource in combating such violence. While the incorrect statement that ‘women and children constitute 80% of the victims of small arms violence’ has been challenged since 2001, States continue to need encouragement to describe more accurately the direct and indirect victimisation from small arms misuse experienced by women, men, girls and boys.

Despite a global reluctance to examine why men are more likely to own, use and be killed or injured by firearms, projects to help men learn non-violent approaches to conflict resolution are providing increasing practical evidence that men, particularly young men, can indeed learn to reject the deadly power conferred by small arms. A small number of interventions have begun working with young men questioning some of the traditional norms related to societal ideals of manhood that may encourage various forms of violence, including use/ownership of firearms.

Progress has been made recently at the international level. At the World Summit in September 2005, the world’s leaders again pledged to end impunity for violence against women and to eradicate policies and practices that discriminate against women. On its fifth anniversary in October 2005, States also renewed their commitment to the full implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325, which calls for equal participation and involvement in all efforts to maintain and promote peace and security. The UN system has now developed a 1325 Action Plan and certain member States are developing national action plans.

In 2005 the UN General Assembly First Committee passed a Resolution on the humanitarian and development impacts of small arms, in which States agreed to:

- take full account of the roles that women and women’s organisations could play in DDR processes
- address the needs of women and girl combatants and dependants in DDR programs
- promote and protect the rights and welfare of children in armed conflicts

States have an opportunity to consolidate this progress on recognition of gender issues in the next phase of the UN small arms process.

### **IANSA recommendations to States:**

- **Include references to and a reporting question on gender in the RevCon outcome documents and any future agreements on small arms control at international, regional and national levels.**

Future international agreements should acknowledge the link between gender and small arms misuse and control. They should acknowledge the different ways in which men and women are victims, and also the multiple roles they play in both supporting and tackling armed violence. The agreements should commit States to including the gender dimension in their annual reports on implementing the PoA.

- **Involve a wide range of women and men in the development and implementation of small control policies, violence prevention strategies and disarmament initiatives.**

States should take practical steps to ensure that women are fully involved in decision-making and other activities to inform security policies at national, regional and international levels. They can achieve greater gender parity in security decision-making using a variety of mechanisms, including rosters of female security experts, consultative committees, and more deliberate recruitment processes. Governments should also solicit the views of organisations that represent women, youth groups or men’s anti-violence initiatives to provide input into National Action Plans.

- **Prioritise action-oriented research to increase knowledge about gender and armed violence.**

The impacts of small arms misuse and proliferation should be disaggregated by sex and age to develop more accurate assessments. Wherever possible, States should also support qualitative studies to investigate the roles of men and women in contexts of armed violence, cultural norms about the demand for guns, and the impact of guns on intimate partner violence. Women’s and men’s resistance to armed violence and contribution to disarmament efforts should also be evaluated.

- **Restrict the acquisition of small arms and ammunition by those who commit intimate partner or family violence.**

Standards are evolving globally to restrict gun possession by perpetrators of intimate partner and family violence. States should harmonise their national firearms legislation with the laws on family violence. Key

principles include: information exchange between responsible agencies; barring access to weapons for convicted offenders or those under restraining orders, and giving police the authority to confiscate guns on the basis of likely threat. For more information on regulating civilian possession of firearms, see the IANSA position paper ‘National regulation of small arms.’

- **Train law enforcement officials to address gender-based armed violence.**

Local law enforcement officers are often the first to respond to, and intervene in, instances of gender-based armed violence (including homophobic violence against men). Police should be trained to respond effectively and sensitively to all forms of gender-based violence.

- **Recognise anti-violence activism and support existing peacebuilding and disarmament initiatives, especially those of the poorest, most marginal members of society.**

Women and men, old and young, are not only victims of armed violence. They also act as community-based peacebuilders, resolve conflicts, support measures to implement security and act as change agents to support violence reduction strategies. Governments should promote local voices and solutions by identifying, supporting and building on the disarmament and peacebuilding activities of grassroots civil society groups, particularly women’s groups.

- **Promote gender equity in the resolution of conflict and peace processes.**

Women have taken leadership roles in peace-building, violence prevention and weapons control in nations transitioning from war. Despite this, they are grossly underrepresented in formal decision-making at the negotiating tables deciding the terms of peace agreements, as well as implementation strategies. As a starting point, States should remedy the startling lack of female third party mediators of peace agreements (four out of 61 UN envoys and Special Representatives for peacemaking are women and none of the twenty-five EU representatives are women) by nominating women to be considered as peacemakers and undertaking affirmative action to train and prepare women for entry to this field.

- **Ensure that DDR programs take into account the different needs of female and male ex-combatants and combatant associates.**

Point 13 of Security Council Resolution 1325 notes the duty of States to take into account the needs of female and male ex-combatants and their dependants when designing DDR programs. To remedy past practice, it is important for States and international organisations to apply realistic criteria for inclusion to include the range of roles performed by women, girls, men and boys in situations of violent conflict. DDR programs can also strive for gender parity amongst personnel, as well as greater awareness and training on gender dimensions of peacebuilding.

- **Direct attention to young men as a group particularly vulnerable to armed violence.**

The challenges faced by men in small arms-affected areas should be more accurately assessed so that programs can be put in place to educate men and to rehabilitate and prevent male violence. In addition to educational opportunities and meaningful employment opportunities for low-income young men, there is also a need for gender-specific attention to how boys are raised, and comprehensive efforts to promote non-violent models of manhood involving governments, civil society, families, and communities.