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For immediate release

UN Arms Talks Meltdown: Conference Allows Global Gun Crisis to Continue

Despite the efforts of the majority of governments to secure real change, the long awaited UN Small Arms conference has ended in failure. Hijacked by a small number of states, notably the US, the conference failed to agree on any measures at all to address the global gun crisis.

Delegations from many countries in Africa and Latin America, the regions worst affected by gun proliferation, complained that their interests were overlooked.

Rebecca Peters, Director of IANSA, said: 'It is to their lasting shame that governments let this happen: they allowed a small number of states to hold them all hostage and to derail any plans which might have brought improvement in this global crisis.'

The UN small arms review conference, only the second of its kind to be called by the UN, should have provided a clear framework for governments to protect people from gun violence. But it ended in acrimony and frustration as agreement on almost all the major issues was blocked by a handful of states, and no outcome document could be agreed.

'My country has suffered appallingly from the effects of the uncontrolled arms trade, and continues to suffer because the guns remain among the civilian population even now that our war has ended. We don't manufacture these guns, yet they end up in our country, erode our security and have terrible consequences for our development,' said Florella Hazeley of the Sierra Leone Action Network on Small Arms, a member of IANSA.

Hazeley continued: 'I attended this meeting in the hope that the governments of the world would work together to tackle these problems, and to address the needs of the survivors of gun violence. They have failed on all counts. How can I go home and explain this?'

Before talks collapsed completely late today, obstruction had occurred in the following areas:

- Progress on global standards for international arms transfers – which would prevent exports to destinations where they might be used for human rights violations – was obstructed primarily by Cuba, India, Iran, Israel and Pakistan. 115 governments had said they supported stronger provisions on transfer controls, and one million people from 160 countries joined the Million Faces petition calling for global arms export standards that was presented to Kofi Annan as the conference opened last week.
- Discussion on how strengthening national laws can prevent gun deaths was blocked by the USA. 60% of the world's guns are in the hands of civilians, and many countries recognise national gun laws as vital to tackling gun violence.
- The US refused to allow the conference to acknowledge the impact of small arms proliferation on development.
- Despite professing concern about the human cost of small arms violence, governments failed to agree to provide support for the survivors of gun violence.
- The US was instrumental in preventing any follow-on global meetings to discuss the small arms trade.

Rebecca Peters said: 'The failure of this meeting will not detract from the enormous amount of work being done at local, national and regional levels around the world to protect people from gun violence. But because gun proliferation is a global problem it does require a global solution, and we will continue to seek ways to make this happen.'

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Notes to editors:

For statistics on the extent and impact of the small arms trade, see http://www.iansa.org/campaigns_events/documents/2006/Statistics-2.pdf

IANSA is a global network of more than 700 civil society organisations including human rights activists, democracy campaigners, development organisations, public health and humanitarian agencies, and victim support groups. Its members work for controls on the international arms trade and for laws to make people safer from gun violence. For more information see www.iansa.org