

## Check against delivery

### Assistance to survivors of gun violence and youth affected by small arms

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My name is Vladimir Djumic and I come from Belgrade, Serbia and Montenegro. I represent the Balkan Youth Union and the South East European Network on Control of Arms – we are members of IANSA.

Many of the violent conflicts in the post cold-war era have been described as asymmetrical warfare, whereby regular forces are confronted by armed non-state groups such as militias and guerrillas.

The rank and file of these militias are often young and unemployed people and even children. The instruments used in these conflicts are predominantly small arms and light weapons.

The reasons for youth and child recruitment are:

1. The vast army of unemployed youth who fall prey to the temptations of warlords and bandits (criminal gangs)
2. In the developing world the system of child protection is often weak so children are vulnerable to kidnapping, abduction and forced recruitment

The consequences of this include:

- Unacceptable levels of drug abuse, banditry and illegal use of small arms among the youth
- Emotional and psychological trauma among the youth and children
- And increasing physical disabilities among the youth

For every individual killed by small arms, many more survive with serious injuries, often permanent disabilities that impede the resumption of a normal way of life. The economic, emotional and psychological effects of armed violence on survivors are huge, both on the individuals and society.

Just to give a few examples from my country:

<p>An ex-combatant of around 25 years old, held a loaded gun in the face of our colleague, in a famous pub in Belgrade city centre, for two hours. He mistakenly thought he was someone he had argued with during the conflict in Bosnia.</p>	<p><b>The consequence:</b> Our colleague is still unable to talk about this, and suffers from constant nightmares, even 10 years later.</p>
<p>An artist (painter) was killed by a ricochet bullet which came from the building opposite while he was sitting at home, watching TV, during the celebratory gunfire in Belgrade suburb for the Serbian New Year in 2004.</p>	<p><b>The consequence:</b> His relatives still cannot come to terms with what happened and find it impossible to believe that his life was taken so suddenly and so pointlessly.</p>

<p>A father killed his youngest son by a ricochet bullet while he was placing his loaded gun on the table after New Years Eve celebratory shooting in the south of Serbia in 2004/05</p>	<p><b>The consequence:</b> This whole family has been destroyed by this tragedy. The father simply cannot accept what he has done – nothing will ever bring his son back.</p>
<p>A girl was shot during the celebratory gunfire in Podgorica, Montenegro, 11 days ago, during the New Years Eve celebration in the city's main square. The bullet went directly through her heart; by a miracle the bullet didn't harm the vital parts of the heart and she survived.</p>	<p><b>The consequence:</b> The man responsible for shooting her believed he had killed her and is haunted by what could have happened.</p>
<p><b>And lastly, unfortunately – I have to mention my personal experience which brought me to work on arms control:</b></p>	
<p>New Year Celebration 1994/1995 A friend of mine was killed by his best friend while trying to take a photograph of him with a gun – the camera flashed, took the friend with the gun by surprise, and he shot him straight through the head. This happened in front of all of their best friends in a small room.</p>	<p><b>The consequence:</b> I witnessed what happened 2 meters from the bullet's path. This tragedy destroyed not only the life of my friend, but also his entire group of friends who remain traumatised by this event.</p>

There are hundreds of similar examples all around the Balkans region and the rest of the world. Events may be in the past but the reality is that the consequences are still here, among us.

In this light the governments of the world have an opportunity at the Review Conference to take preventive actions against to reduce the misuse of guns, and particularly the negative impacts on youth and children.

Based on the practical experiences of my organisation and many others in the IANSA network, some specific action governments should consider include:

- Strengthening the linkages between the UN small arms control process, public health injury prevention strategies and support to the hundreds of thousands who survive gun violence every year with injuries and trauma;
- Focus on the specific and diverse needs of young men and women, often the hardest hit by armed violence, with dedicated rehabilitation and reintegration programs for youth caught up in armed violence;
- Survivors are a constituency that can help identify risk factors and contribute perspectives to interventions and policy development. Through health service providers, advocacy organisations and government agencies, their opinions and input can be gauged and may well provide insights not well understood, including how to reduce the demand for guns;
- Support the collection of consistent information to inform health service provision and effective criminal justice processes, and cooperation between different government departments. Gaps can be identified as part of National Action Plans on small arms.