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international action network on small arms

Women's Network

Gender-specific action to prevent small arms violence: Practical recommendations for States

Introduction: The gendered impact of small arms and light weapons

The proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons exacerbates inequality between males and females 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 experience gun violence differently and play a variety of roles in resisting, perpetrating, supporting and addressing the human and economic 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 in the past five years 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.[1] To date, however, there has been little recognition that male victims and perpetrators deserve special attention when disarmament and arms control processes are planned. This gap must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

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.[2]

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.

Progress since 2001

The United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms (PoA) contains only one reference to gender, in paragraph 6 of the Preamble where Sates 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." Men, who in numerical terms are the largest number of victims and perpetrators of armed violence, are not mentioned at all.

While women continue to be misrepresented as the largest number of victims of armed violence, their 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 resistance to armed violence is lost. Because the language of 'vulnerability' prevails, it remains possible to portray women as being exactly like children and the elderly, hapless victims of prolific weapons, rather than a key resource in combating such violence.

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

In December 2005 the UN General Assembly First Committee passed Resolution 60/68 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

In 2003, less than 8% of States included language on gender in their BMS reports.[3] However, by the

[1] World Health Organisation (2002), *World Report on Violence and Health*, pp. 274-275.
[2] L.E. Saltzman et al. (1992), "Weapon involvement and injury outcomes in family and intimate assaults," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 267: 22, 10 June.

[3] Emily Schroeder and Lauren Newhouse (2004), "Gender and Small Arms: Moving in to the Mainstream," *ISS Monograph* No. 104.

January 2006 PrepCom, seven statements during the thematic debate highlighted the importance of gender considerations, both in addressing armed violence and in creating effective DDR. For the first time, several statements emphasised the importance of focusing upon concerns specific to men as well as women.[4]

At the 2006 Review Conference on Small Arms it was clear that a large number of States supported the addition of a reference to gender to the PoA, as a paragraph referring to gender and to Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security consistently appeared in a number of versions of the draft Outcome Document produced by the President before and throughout the Conference, including in the his last substantial draft of 3 July. However, States were unable to agree on any way forward and the Conference ended without an Outcome Document.

States have an opportunity to consolidate this progress on recognition of gender issues in the next phase of the UN small arms process and are strongly urged to continue to move forward on this issue.

Key policy concerns

It is vital that a gender perspective be mainstreamed into work on small arms and light weapons at the international, regional and national levels. Since 2001 there has been 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; in the design and funding of interventions; in monitoring and evaluating weapons control programs; and in formulating long-term strategies to combat the global small arms crisis.

Applying a gender perspective to the problems created by prolific small arms requires understanding the different ways in which men, women, boys and girls are affected by and respond to armed violence. An important first step would be to ensure that future agreements on small arms at all levels incorporate gendered language and affirm the full and equal participation of women in the small arms process, while recognising that men need special programmes to help them reject armed violence.

Gender language. It is vital that future agreements on small arms facilitate a better understanding of the gendered impacts of small arms. They should include references to men and boys. The distinctive needs of women and men, girls and boys, should be referenced throughout the texts, particularly in reference to concrete strategies to address these needs.

Women's full and equal participation. Future agreements should also explicitly recognise the role of women's organisations in preventing, combating and eradicating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons *in all its aspects*. They should take into full account the roles that women can play in post-conflict peacebuilding, crime prevention, peacekeeping, and DDR processes.

Practical Recommendations

In addition to the above policy concerns, the IANSA Women's Network has developed nine practical recommendations related to concrete action on the ground:

The full implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. Future agreements on small arms should be aligned with Security Council Resolution 1325, as its full implementation will play a vital role in combating the illicit trade in small arms *in all its aspects*. The Resolution calls on states to ensure women are fully involved in the conflict resolution and prevention and peacebuilding processes, including DDR programmes. Point 13 encourages States to take into account the needs of female and male ex-combatants and their dependants when designing DDR programs. DDR programs should also strive for gender parity amongst personnel, as well as greater awareness and training on gender dimensions of peacebuilding.

The involvement of the perspectives of women in the small arms policy arena. 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, including changes to national gun laws, disarmament processes and development activities. Greater gender parity in security decision-making can be achieved by using a variety of mechanisms, including rosters of female security experts, consultative committees, and more deliberate recruitment processes.

A new focus at the community level. There is an urgent need to fully address the community dimension within the UN small arms process, to underscore and support the importance of local initiatives, many of which are led by women. States should promote local voices and solutions by building on the disarmament and peacebuilding activities of grassroots civil society groups, particularly women's groups.

[4] Nicholas Marsh, Cate Buchanan, Mireille Widmer et al, "Overview of governmental statements made at the small arms PrepCom, 9-17 January 2006, New York," Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue Occasional Paper.

The harmonisation of national gun legislation and policies with other efforts to prevent violence against women. Given the particular role of legally owned guns in the murder, injury, and intimidation of women and children in the home,[5] several countries have instituted screening mechanisms to prevent acquisition by people who have a history of family or intimate partner violence, even if they do not have criminal convictions. 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. National measures to prevent intimate partner and family violence should be integrated into national and regional measures to effectively implement the PoA.

The coordination of measures to address the specific needs of women and girls surviving armed violence, particularly sexual violence at gunpoint. The prevention of armed sexual violence requires coordinated justice, health and law enforcement measures. States should implement Point 10 of Security Council Resolution 1325, which calls on all armed parties to conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse. In post-conflict situations, trauma and legal counselling for victims of sexual violence should be incorporated into reintegration programmes.

Training law enforcement officials to respond to 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. Law enforcement agencies should seek gender parity amongst personnel and actively recruit female officers.

A focus on young men. Male youth are the primary perpetrators, victims and survivors of small arms and light weapons misuse- in every setting and in every region of the world. A small number of successful interventions have shown that education and awareness-raising can reduce armed violence, reinforce men's resilience to being drawn into armed violence and reinforce other small arms and light weapons control measures. Programmes should be included in both formal and informal schooling facilities and in both primary and secondary schools to pre-emptively address and educate about underlying social factors of armed violence. These programmes can be linked to poverty reduction efforts.

A call for action-oriented research to increase knowledge about gender and armed violence. The reporting of incidents of gun death, injury, and misuse should be disaggregated by sex, age, and relationship. 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 also need to be evaluated.

The establishment of an Intersessional Programme of Work which addresses gender. The UN process on small arms should develop an Intersessional Programme of Work to prepare for the next Biennial Meeting of States which includes the discussion of gender-based strategies to prevent armed violence. The IANSA Women's Network is prepared to lend it support to such a session in any way it can, and can offer the assistance of many qualified experts.

About the IANSA Women's Network

Women have taken a leading role in efforts to prevent gun violence all over the world. Despite this, they remain underrepresented in small arms policy and practice. The IANSA Women's Network was founded to connect organisations working on violence against women and women's issues with the global campaign to control the proliferation and misuse of small arms and to ensure this campaign reflects women's concerns and reality. It aims to build a united and dynamic movement of women resisting gun violence around the world.

IANSA Women's Network members come from a diverse range of organisations from every region in the world. They are working to mobilise popular opinion against the proliferation and misuse of small arms, lobby for policy change at the national, regional and international levels, and produce much-needed information about the different ways in which gun violence affects women, men, girls and boys.

The IANSA Secretariat supports the work of Women's Network members by promoting their work to the larger disarmament community, particularly at the UN level, producing information on topics related to women, gender and small arms and acting as a focal point for global policy on gender and small arms. The Women's Network portal, **www.iansa.org/women**, contains the Network's quarterly Bulletin, **Women at Work: Preventing Gun Violence**, as well as news and resources on women, gender and small arms.

[5] Based on Zimring, Franklin (1991), 'Firearms, violence and public policy,' *Scientific American*, November, pp. 24-30.

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