

## UN Commission on the Status of Women 2008

IANSA Women's Network and UN Office for Disarmament Affairs

Joint event: 'The impact of guns on women's lives'

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### **Arms Control Policies in Latin America: the importance of coordination and implementation of national and regional policies**

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The on-going gun buyback in Argentina has been an enormous success. 70,000 weapons and 450,000 rounds of ammunition have been collected since 10 July 2007. Civil society has already witnessed the destruction of more than 20,000 of those weapons, and 30,000 more will be destroyed later this year.

What did we learn about the role of women in disarmament? We learnt that despite the lack of a gender perspective in policies to address the small arms problem, women are actually leading the way in disarmament.

Just as we saw in the recent Brazilian gun buyback, women are the motor behind disarming the civilian population. Despite the fact that 95% of gun owners are male in Argentina, 50% of people who handed in weapons were women. This suggests that many guns owned by men were actually handed in by their wives or partners.

Some explanation emerges from a 2007 national opinion poll on attitudes towards guns. The poll of 1200 respondents was commissioned by APP and conducted by Ipsos-Mora y Araujo. Some of the findings include:

- The owners of guns are men between 45-59 years;
- More women than men consider that having a gun in the home is dangerous;
- More men than women think that a gun provides security;
- There is a relationship between masculinity and gun possession: "macho men have guns".

Latin America is one of the most unequal regions in the world. It holds 14% of the world's population, with more than 240 million people living in poverty. In addition, it is disproportionately affected by armed violence: 42% of homicides with firearms occur in Latin America. And yet, all countries in the region have democratic systems and there are no inter-state conflicts or armed conflicts (besides Colombia or Haiti). Latin America as region has the lowest budget in defense and armament.

Why are 11 of the 13 countries with the highest rates of armed violence in the world located in the region? Of course, there is not just one reason but a plethora of political, economic and social factors. Inequality, underdevelopment and lack of opportunities may be the underlying causes of violence, but adding guns into the mix exacerbates the severity of that violence.

The easy access to guns, lack of controls on stockpiles and a lack of resources and commitment to controlling the problem, together with a lack of state capacity to control the problem, increases the proliferation of firearms and the armed violence.

Latin America is a peaceful region. It has no nuclear weapons and has signed up to, promoted and encouraged a variety of multi-lateral treaties and agreements on disarmament; particularly in the field of small arms (such as UN PoA, ATT, etc). In addition, we have regional agreements such as CIFTA or OEA regulations, and sub-regional instruments (552 Decision, Code of Conduct, MERCOSUR Group, etc.).

Even though Latin America is a regional unity, a sub-regional approach to analyzing the problem of small arms and their policies is more appropriate. Some states share common factors: the lack of coordination among agencies for the development of joint action, the lack of exchange of information, and inability by weak states to implement international policies

But one thing we can learn is that women need to be involved more in disarmament. Women have an important role in peace processes, especially in the promotion of disarmament initiatives, which are increasingly reaching out to and including women. Successful efforts are being made by civil society in conjunction with national and local governments. Gun buybacks are just one example of a range of gun control measures that States undertake. The success of such initiatives will depend on the clarity of the message – that women are safer in a gun-free home.