

Women's Campaigns Against Armed Violence

“Women's organisations, mostly domestic violence support groups and women's shelters, were instrumental in the successful campaign for gun control in Australia.

Over 200 groups engaged in a public education and lobbying campaign to take guns away from domestic violence offenders and prevent them from acquiring new firearms.

A series of family violence shootings with legally held weapons had exposed the inadequacies of the existing laws, in particular the lack of firearms registration in some states which made it impossible to identify and remove firearms held by domestic violence offenders.

The multi-state coordinated campaign by women's groups helped secure comprehensive firearm registration as a component of Australia's new national uniform gun laws.”

Rebecca Peters
Director of IANSA

Women's campaigns against gun violence are diverse, dynamic and creative. The issue has become part of the agenda of many women's groups, who are taking their concerns and stories to local, national, regional, and international forums. Women are addressing the impacts of licit and illicit firearms and gun violence both within the public sphere and at home, as well as highlighting the differences and connections between women's experiences of armed violence in the North and the South, in conflict zones, and in non-conflict zones.

Women are still systematically excluded or underrepresented from most decision-making forums relating to small arms, disarmament, demobilisation and peace building. Parties that have a financial or cultural interest in perpetuating small arms proliferation, such as the gun lobby and the military, are often privileged stakeholders with governments in discussions of small arms issues. In contrast, women's groups are campaigning to place the human costs of gun violence as the central concern of governments in the development of gun control, disarmament and peace building initiatives.

A number of women-led or women-focused initiatives are taking shape around the world:

Grassroots Organising in Brazil

Outraged by the high rates of gun violence in Rio de Janeiro, the women-led public education campaign, 'Choose gun free! It's your weapon or me' is dedicated to disarming the city. The aim is to sensitise and mobilise women against armed violence and to increase popular pressure on the government to pursue rigorous disarmament initiatives. The Viva Rio campaign spreads the message that, contrary to media and cultural messages, guns do not affirm the sexuality of men, or make them desirable to women. Activists hope to expand the campaign to other states in Brazil, and other countries, particularly in South America.

Organising across borders in West Africa

The Mano River Union Women's Network for Peace, with members from Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, has brought together a diverse range of women with a common goal – finding a way to end the fighting that has debilitated three countries. Campaign members include grassroots organisers and women working within formal political processes nationally, regionally and internationally. According to Isha Dyfan from Sierra Leone, “Women's Networks have been pivotal in the resolution of the conflict in Sierra Leone, and getting negotiations started between the Mano River Countries.”

Activism and Lobbying - Worldwide

In countries from South Africa, United States and Papua New Guinea, hundreds of thousands of women have been taking to the streets to say no to gun violence. Mass protests have been organised by the Million Mom March in the United States and by Gun Free South Africa; these huge public displays have been combined with lobbying and community education campaigns to unite women's voices and publicly highlight women's concerns. These activities have generated widespread public awareness, and women have been able to share ideas and gain inspiration to continue their campaigns.

Initiatives and Challenges

In recent years, both small arms and gender perspectives in conflict prevention have found a prominent place on the international agenda. The Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, adopted in October 2000, specifically mentions the need to incorporate gender perspectives in all areas of peace support operations, including disarmament, demobilisation and rehabilitation initiatives.

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom is organising Peace Women (www.peacewomen.org), a global campaign to help facilitate education and mobilization efforts for the rapid and full implementation of Resolution 1325. Despite these initiatives, women are still heavily under-represented in decision-making roles.

In the 2001 Conference on the Illicit Trade of Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects, women's issues and concerns were largely ignored. In the lead up to the final 2005 Conference, women's organisations will be urging governments to integrate gender issues into their regional and international small arms initiatives. Women's organisations also see it as essential to introduce strong domestic gun laws that stop the proliferation and misuse of firearms within their homes and communities.

Get Active

The IANSA Women's Network supports organisations working on women and violence prevention, to mobilise, energise, organise, and resist gun violence in their communities. Our goal is to connect organisations, provide a clearinghouse of information resources and build a united and dynamic movement of women resisting gun violence around the world.

The IANSA Women's Network is working to:

- Strengthen IANSA's gender sensitivity and capacity to address women's concerns
- Educate women's groups about small arms availability and misuse, and encourage them to participate in IANSA's global network
- Ensure that international disarmament forums emphasise gender perspectives and promote the priorities of women
- Raise public awareness about how gun proliferation and misuse affect women's human rights.

To get involved with the IANSA Women's Network, visit the Women's Network web portal at www.iansa.org/women - the gateway to information about women and gun violence.

To subscribe to the IANSA Women's Network email list. Please send an email to IANSAwomen-subscribe.yahogroups.com or email us on women@iansa.org.

Works cited and consulted:

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At the first US-sponsored meeting in Iraq to discuss the development of an interim government, only four out of 123 participants were women.

At a subsequent meeting there were only three, out of approximately 300 participants.

Not one woman is included in the legal team of lawyers and judges appointed by the US-led Coalition to develop a new legal code for the country. The exclusion of Iraqi women in decision-making processes undermines the spirit and the letter of UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

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