

Armed Violence and Development

Civil society submission to the Secretary-General's report on "Promoting Development through Reduction and Prevention of Armed Violence", requested by UN General Assembly Resolution 63/23

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Armed violence – the intentional use, or threatened use, of arms to inflict death, injury or psychosocial harm – is a major humanitarian, human rights, health and developmental problem. Armed violence – including both conflicts, and non-conflict organised and interpersonal criminal violence – kills and injures millions of civilians worldwide every year. Currently non-conflict armed violence kills more people than conflict-related violence. Armed violence refers both to weapons and to the people that use them, and includes as important categories for action both small arms and light weapons and all forms of explosive weapons.

Armed violence and development – linkages

Armed violence is a global concern. The total number of people victimised by armed violence globally has continued to rise and the World Health Organisation has projected that this trend will continue to 2030. Although numbers of conventional conflicts and direct casualties declined in the late 1990s, conflicts related to natural resources under increased pressure as a result of climate change, are expected to increase in number, severity and scale of human impact, including large-scale population displacements and migration. Criminal armed violence also presents an increasing threat, domestically, across borders, and between global regions. Armed violence undermines international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including economic, cultural and social rights.

Conflicts involving natural resource exploitation, ethnic or border disputes often rely on importation of weapons, and frequently export instability to neighbouring countries. Armed violence weakens governance at community, metropolitan, regional and national levels. This creates and expands space for illicit markets and organised criminal activities to flourish nationally and transnationally, increasing regional and ultimately global insecurity.

Armed violence undermines human security, decreasing household incomes, health and education, and reducing local and national agricultural and industrial productivity. Armed violence undermines each one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), increasing poverty and inequality. Armed violence significantly reduces the chances of achieving the MDGs by 2015, and significantly reduces the effectiveness of aid. Armed violence increases the costs of production and trade, reducing Gross National Income (GNI), and frightening off investment in developing countries in need of capital.

Armed violence impacts men, women and children in diverse ways. While men dominate as perpetrators and direct victims of armed violence, women are at particular risk of certain crimes because of their gender, such as violence in the home and rape, and the longer-term consequences of impoverishment and reduced development opportunities in peacetime in post-conflict settings. Children are at special risk of being recruited into criminal or other armed groups.

Action on armed violence

Action on armed violence has not been adequately integrated into development programming. Armed violence prevention and reduction programmes are seen as primarily technical interventions with emphasis on peacekeeping and reconstruction, in the case of conflict, and in the case of criminal/civil armed violence, reductions in supply of and access to weapons and/or action to address immediate risk factors such as weak security sector capacity, community gangs and drugs use. These are important and necessary interventions, requiring greater support from development programming. Equally important for sustainable impact on the

level of armed violence are development programmes that deal with underlying risk factors such as youth unemployment, rapid unregulated urbanisation, and inequalities in access to vital resources such as water, health care, education, and community and political participation. These developmental interventions are applicable in both conflict and non-conflict settings.

Action on armed violence – whether classed as reduction or prevention – is frequently taken too late. Much conventional programming on armed violence attempts to reduce ongoing violence or to prevent escalation of violence once discernible risk factors have emerged as lines of contest or dispute.

A more effective approach is to design and implement development programmes with a view to building individual, community and institutional capacities to pursue livelihoods and growth in peace. This properly preventive approach includes national development planning (supported by donor policy) that emphasises equitable distribution of services and opportunities among across sub-national regions and groups, but it also includes strengthening local or community level security, reducing the availability of arms, strengthening respect for international human rights law and international humanitarian law and investing in decentralised dispute resolution and peacebuilding institutions.

Civil society organisations have experience with individual projects and broader, integrated approaches that address armed violence reduction through development programming. This experience should be of considerable value to governments, multilateral agencies and other interested actors.

Recommendations

- 1. Governments must recognise armed violence as a key development issue.** This developmental understanding of armed violence complements the imperatives of humanitarian action and human rights. Armed violence must be understood as a wider phenomenon than that described by ‘fragile and conflict-affected states’ alone. While security sector reform, small arms control, justice sector capacity-building and post-conflict reconstruction remain essential, action on armed violence requires more integrated developmental interventions. Action to address the risks and problems of armed violence should be explicitly included and integrated into national development plans.
- 2. UN Member States should collect action-oriented data on armed violence occurring under their sovereignty.** This may include, for example, rates of homicide, violent crime, and conflict-related deaths and injuries (including post-conflict effects). Without reliable data, commitment to act and ability to measure effectiveness of action is impossible. Member States should, as a basic expression of their responsibility to protect citizens and civilians, in the context of wider international obligations, record and report transparently levels of armed violence in their countries, or as a result of their actions internationally. They should also develop capacity to identify factors associated with armed violence, in order to design and finance interventions to prevent and reduce it.
- 3. UN Member States should sign, ratify and comply with their obligations as set out in the range of existing international, multilateral and regional instruments** relevant to armed violence reduction. These include, inter alia, the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons (and related regional programmes), and treaties banning the use of specific weapon systems (such as the Mine Ban Treaty and the Cluster Munition Convention). States should also work as swiftly as possible to agree an effective, legally binding Arms Trade Treaty, centred around international human rights law, international humanitarian law and sustainable development, to regulate the international transfer of conventional weapons. States must also abide by commitments assumed under the UN Charter and

relevant international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions and the two international Covenants on Human Rights.

4. **Donor governments should allocate adequate aid to armed violence reduction.** Donors should increase total aid flows (to meet the agreed 0.7% GDP commitment), and reduce volatility. Aid levels and aid volatility are associated, respectively negatively and positively, with a country's level of armed violence. Aid recipients should ensure that adequate and reliable streams of aid are allocated to State and non-State actors implementing developmentally-integrated programmes to prevent and reduce armed violence.

5. **UN Member States, UN agencies, international finance institutions, and civil society actors should establish an ongoing global dialogue on issues, policies and practical programmes that aim to reduce armed violence through development initiatives.** UN Member States and the UN Secretariat and agencies should engage in an ongoing, broad-based and structured exploration of the linkages between armed violence and development, with a view to increasing security through practical, integrated measures to reduce armed violence.