

*Check against delivery*

**The Second Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects**

**Statement by Hazel De Wet,**

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**on the Impact of SALW on Children**

**for the Thematic Discussion**

**15 July, 2005, New York**

Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I wish to express UNICEF's appreciation for the opportunity to speak today to share key lessons learned from our field work on the impact on children of the proliferation and illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. In particular, I will highlight some of the linkages that have emerged and also some of the actions that are being taken to address them.

As we have heard in many statements, the number of direct victims from the proliferation of small arms stretches into the millions. This number is compounded when we calculate the indirect victims, many of whom are children and women. For children, the continued uncontrolled proliferation and misuse of small arms has had a disastrous impact on their well being, their rights and development.

Caught up in conflicts that have multiple causes, children's rights continue to be grossly violated as they fall victim to disease, malnutrition, displacement and brutal violence. Whether they are drawn in as fighters, deliberately targeted as civilians or forced into becoming perpetrators of atrocities themselves, children are bearing enormous consequences. Sexual abuse, violence, and exploitation become weapons of war that leave lasting psychosocial wounds and directly contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS.

The Programme of Action calls for measures to address the special needs of children affected by armed conflict. In this regard, **UNICEF** has seen an encouraging trend over the past the past five years, during which international legal protection of children affected by armed conflict has become much stronger. Some of the key international legal instruments include:

- Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 38
- Convention Concerning Worst Forms of Child Labour (ILO Convention 182)
- The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court - classifies the enlistment of children under 15 years of age as a war crime and specifies that only individual over the age of 18 can be tried at the ICC.
- The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflicts
- The Africa Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.
- Security Council Resolutions on children and armed conflict including, Resolutions 1261, 1314, 1379, 1460, 1539

Now that we have made progress in creating an international legal framework to protect children affected by armed conflict, it is time to translate those promises and standards into action and to ensure that they become integrated into the daily reality of those children.

Towards this goal, UNICEF provides emergency assistance to children, families, communities and governments in 55 crisis-affected countries, working closely with many partners and often at great risk to our dedicated staff and contractors.

## UNICEF's Core Commitments in Humanitarian Crises

One of our key contributions to the Programme of Action has been the development of *UNICEF's Core Commitments for Children in Emergencies*. These core commitments specify that UNICEF shall either work directly or with partners to:

1. Monitor, report and advocate against the recruitment and use of children in ANY CAPACITY during armed conflicts;
2. Seek commitments from involved parties to refrain from recruiting and using children;
3. Negotiate the release of children who were recruited and introduce demobilisation and reintegration programmes;
4. Within established mechanisms, monitor, report on, and advocate against the use of landmines and other indiscriminate weapons by both state and non state actors. UNICEF also coordinates mine risk education.

A second important measure of the Programme of Action having a direct impact on children is the area of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration. UNICEF and its partners are actively contributing to this measure, and in recent years, have been undertaking DDR for children associated with fighting forces in 19 countries. Through this work, it has become clear that the release of children from fighting forces is only the beginning of an often long and difficult process. UNICEF's lessons learned in this area have shown that successful DDR is crucial to ensure that children are not re-recruited.

Further, draft guidelines on children and DDR have been written based on relevant provisions of international law, field experience and lessons learned. Among some of the important recommendations are to ensure that DDR processes recognise the specific needs of women and children, and capitalise on and promote grassroots peace building and disarmament initiatives of women and youth.

A third key measure in the Programme of Action of particular importance to safeguarding the well-being of children is the call for States, regional, sub-regional and international organisations, research centres, health and medical institutions and others to develop and support action-oriented research aimed at facilitating greater awareness and better understanding of the nature and scope of the problems associated with the illicit trade in SALW in all its aspects.

Contributing to this measure, **UNICEF** and various partners are collaborating in the landmark "UN Study on Violence against Children". In conjunction with the World Health Organisation, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and other agencies, the study will provide a detailed global

picture of the nature, extent and causes of violence against children and young people. It will also propose clear recommendations for action to prevent and reduce such violence.

Complimenting this process, and as called for by the UN Security Council, UNICEF and other UN agencies and partners are in the process of developing a system to monitor and report on egregious rights violations perpetrated against children in conflict-affected areas. The improved flow and quality of information will ultimately inform and enhance protection measures for children.

Although we focus much of our discussion of the Programme of Action on children affected by armed conflict, the impacts from the widespread proliferation of small arms in other countries and regions not involved in armed conflict can be equally as devastating for children. As we have learned from data gathered in Brazil, more than 100 Brazilians die every day by guns, most of them young men from poor communities. In Rio de Janeiro, young men are more likely to be killed by firearms than all other external causes of death combined, including traffic accidents, illness, and other kinds of injuries.

## **Funding**

As we recognise, our work and achievements have not come about without considerable dedication, commitment and resources. As we also note, there is still much more to be done and further support and resources will be needed. It is critically important that funding be available to carry out these (and future) initiatives, which can help contribute to children's dignity and rights being upheld.

Children are affected by armed conflict only where there is no will to prevent it. Experience in dozens of conflicts confirms that extraordinary actions have been and can be taken to protect and provide for children in armed conflict and situations of instability. I urge you to remain conscious of the special needs of all children and the central role they play in the future of humanity.

UNICEF looks forward to the Review Conference in 2006 and for the opportunity to amend and improve the Programme of Action. Together, we can do more to implement the measures in the Programme of Action and fulfil our responsibility to children. This success will provide a safer world and a more hopeful future.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.