

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**

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on the Human Impact of SALW**

**for the Panel Presentation by
the Coordinating Action on Small Arms**

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Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour to present this statement today on behalf of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, and the World Health Organisation.

As we spend this Biennial Meeting reviewing progress on implementation in the Programme of Action, we are also considering areas where greater attention is needed in order to realise our shared goals of preventing, combating and eradicating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons 'in all its aspects'. While many activities have been undertaken since our last meeting, considerable dedication and commitment to the Programme of Action is urgently needed, in order to reduce the **spiralling human costs** associated with the proliferation and illicit trade of small arms.

Let us take this opportunity to recall how important our efforts are. If we do not achieve full implementation of the PoA by the 2006 Review Conference, then we will not have fulfilled our duty. The mechanisms we seek to establish have an enormous impact on the lives and well-being of all our people. Our success or failure may be recorded by the human costs that will be borne by current and future generations, as **the human impact of small arms violence is enormous**.

Direct Impacts

As we are aware, small arms and light weapons (SALW) - the weapons of choice in today's conflicts - are estimated to kill hundreds of thousands of people every year. While current data do not permit exact calculations, there is every likelihood that the global figure for non-fatal injuries arising from small arms violence runs into the millions.

In the six months preceding this meeting, 13 humanitarian staff have been killed and kidnapped in Afghanistan and at least five in Darfur, Sudan. In such situations, the delivery of relief to millions in need is at stake.

In terms of global mortality, violence is a leading cause of death among youth and young adults. Indeed, in many settings in low-income countries, violence is **the** leading cause of death among young men, and in these settings, gun violence tends to be the most common cause of violent death.

Indirect Impacts

As we have also learned, the widespread use and misuse of SALW ignites and fuels conflicts, causes massive population displacement and destabilises regions. Related research in this area has demonstrated that women and children are particularly vulnerable. As our recent discussions in the Security Council have noted, up to 90% of the entire population in the districts of Gulu, Pader and Kitgum in Northern Uganda, now live in camps. In Darfur, attacks against villages continue and displacement is still a tactic of war.

Small arms proliferation can also lead to lack of food security, and the loss of access to healthcare, education, and other opportunities. Their use and misuse leads to psychosocial trauma, obstructs humanitarian relief and development programmes, weakens traditional family and community structures, and exacerbates gender-based violence.

SALW are also used to undermine peace initiatives and foster a "culture of violence." Moreover, small arms are regularly used to commit human rights abuses.

Impact on Women

As we have discussed in our fora here and around the world, prolific small arms and light weapons increase the threat of intimidation and abuse and heighten the lethality of violence, both inside the home and in the public arena. Constrained by fear, women's political participation, as well as their capacity to perform daily household functions such as food provision, water and fuel collection and other family sustenance activities, is severely curtailed.

Women also carry the greatest burden of caring for the injured, the sick, the traumatised, the elderly and the orphaned, and prolific SALW compound the difficulties they face in their work and divert public and private resources away from daily activities.

Gender-based violence is also made more likely, and more severe, when SALW are readily available. As we have seen in North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo, NGOs have recorded thousands of cases of gender-based violence over a one-month period. The adverse consequences for women's physiological and psychological well-being has an impact beyond their immediate lives, since it negatively affects their dependents, increases costs to health services, and compromises their economic, political and social activities.

Impact on Children

The devastation created by the uncontrolled proliferation and misuse of SALW has a tremendous impact on the well-being of children, their rights and development.

Over the last decade, millions of children have been killed in conflict situations, have been orphaned or been seriously injured or permanently disabled and millions have been left with grave psychological trauma. At the present moment, there are over 20 million children who have been displaced by war within and outside their countries. Moreover, hundreds of thousands of young persons under the age of 18 are currently being exploited as child soldiers around the world.

In environments where small arms are abundant, children frequently fall victim to accidents involving small arms. In addition, the exposure of children to the use of SALW in their environment instils the belief that weapons are an essential instrument for survival and protection in everyday life.

The negative impact of small arms on children in conflict and post-conflict societies is especially acute today, as the spread of civil wars and conflicts conducted by non-state actors, militias, and informal armies expose growing numbers of children to the risk of participation, whether voluntary or coerced, in such unregulated forms of violence. In Liberia and the DRC, the re-recruitment of former child combatants is further fuelling the on going conflicts in Cote d'Ivoire and in the DRC.

Impact on Refugees

The proliferation of small arms can have a grave impact on the security of refugees and displaced persons, as well as on those who seek to assist them. The savage attack on the Gatumba Camp in 2004 and the on-going attacks by the Lords Resistance Army in northern Uganda are chilling reminders of the human costs associated with un-checked small arms proliferation.

Further, the presence of small arms in camps presents a particular threat to refugee women and girls, who are especially vulnerable to gender-based violence, rape and other forms of sexual abuse in a climate where social and family structures may have collapsed.

UN Actions

During the period since the First Biennial Meeting, UN agencies and offices have continued their work with partners to reduce and combat the demand, proliferation and impact of small arms and armed violence. Relying on offices in over 158 countries and territories, the UN is conducting initiatives related to the wide spectrum of multi-dimensional challenges associated with preventing, combating and eradicating the illicit trade small arms **in all its aspects**. Through this work, UN agencies and offices are committed to reducing the demand for guns and the opportunities for their use; and to offering other avenues for security, protection of human rights, sustainable livelihoods and development.

Within this context, WHO and UNDP have joined forces to develop the Armed Violence Prevention Programme (AVPP). This programme aims to reduce the demand for small arms through reductions in violence.

Additionally, UNDP and UNICEF are conducting small arms awareness or landmine risk education in more than 35 countries to teach communities about the potential dangers posed by these weapons.

Significant achievements have been registered during the biennium in the UN's interventions in disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants; and DDR continues to be one of the most important components of peacekeeping operations. In this regard, the Security Council has increased its focus on cross-border activities and peacekeeping operations addressing the issue of cross-border activities in Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone. This regional approach to DDR is crucial since DDR operations are more likely to succeed if rigorous measures are in place to curb linkages between illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons, illicit trade in natural and other resources, cross border abduction and recruitment, and armed conflicts.

It has also been recognised that strengthening the linkage between DDR operations and long-term development processes is crucial to ensure the successful transition from peacekeeping to long-term stability. In this light, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) has been leading a UN interagency process with 13 UN departments, agencies, programmes and funds for the joint development of a set of policies, guidelines and procedures on 26 key areas of DDR. Known as the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS), the IDDRS will provide clear and accessible guidance to DDR practitioners to better inform the planning and implementation of programmes.

Complimentary to this process, DPKO has also established an integrated DDR unit with UNDP in peacekeeping missions in Sudan and Haiti, which has brought the disarmament and development aspects of DDR programmes together in a more holistic fashion.

Furthermore, UN agencies and offices have conducted regional consultations on small arms with Member States in Europe, Asia, Africa and the Middle East; and have performed several individual country needs assessments in order to share best practices and to initiate programmes that will contribute towards the realisation of the Programme of Action.

Special Focus on Refugee & IDP Security

As we have also experienced since our last meeting, serious challenges continue to exist for the protection of refugees and IDPs. Over the last several years, UNHCR has endeavoured to translate conceptual frameworks into operational reality through a range of activities and initiatives.

Specifically, UNHCR's Executive Committee has adopted *Conclusion No. 94 on Maintaining the Civilian and Humanitarian Character of Asylum*, to encourage and support processes leading to the disarmament of armed elements and the identification, separation and internment of combatants.

Further, UNHCR also seeks to strengthen partnerships and provide expert advice, training and technical assistance to national authorities. These interventions help ensure law and order in refugee populated areas and prevent the proliferation of small arms amongst refugee communities and the infiltration of armed elements and combatants. For example, the Government of Canada assisted UNHCR through the deployment of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police who advises Guinean police counterparts in maintaining law and order in the refugee camps.

Special Focus on Security for Children

The UN Programme of Action recommends that actions be taken at the national level to address the special needs of children affected by armed conflict, in particular the reunification with their family, their reintegration into civil society, and their appropriate rehabilitation. UNICEF is working with governments, non-state entities, civil society and partners in support of this objective through its interventions in the protection of children's rights and programmes to help meet their basic needs and expand their opportunities to reach their full potential.

At the global level, and as called for by the UN Security Council, the UN and international NGOs are 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.

UN agencies and offices also recognise that DDR programmes cannot focus only on former adult combatants, but also on their dependants, particularly women and children. It is equally important that DDR programmes address the special needs of children associated with fighting forces. Various UN agencies, including UNHCR, UNICEF and UNIFEM, are support programmes in 19 countries to assist these individuals. Furthermore, the carrying or handing over of a weapon must not be a precondition for participation in DDR programmes, as many children who are otherwise associated with armed forces and armed groups, particularly girls, are often left out as a consequence.

The human cost of small arms proliferation and misuse not only impacts children affected by armed conflict, but also extends to countries and regions in crisis. Important work has also been achieved by the UN and its partners on behalf of these children. Noteworthy among these efforts has been the two-year small arms education project by the Department for Disarmament Affairs (DDA), in partnership with the Hague Appeal for Peace. The project, carried out in Albania, Cambodia, Niger and Peru, focused on developing community-based peace and disarmament education teams, education curriculum, training of peace and disarmament education teachers, programmes in schools, non-formal education programmes, creating and applying results from implementing assessment tools, and developing ideas for replicability and sustainability.

Further important work is being carried out in the Secretary General's landmark study on violence against children. The joint initiative, directly supported by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNICEF and WHO, 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 and urge governments to fulfil their obligation to prevent and eliminate violence against children.

Future Directions/ Challenges and Opportunities

Address Supply and Demand Equally

The activities described above have been useful in addressing some of the impacts of small arms violence on human security. However, the effectiveness of these efforts remains minimal unless the causes of small arms violence are properly addressed and all aspects of the UN Programme of Action at each level: national, regional and global - are implemented.

While the Programme of Action is a comprehensive document that recognises the multi-faceted dimension of issues related to the illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons, there are important aspects to it that are underdeveloped and that have direct relevance for diminishing the human security impact of small arms violence.

An important aspect that is severely underdeveloped is the explicit call that stresses the urgency of combating illicit trade simultaneously from both a **supply and demand** perspective (Section I, Para 7). Notwithstanding this, the majority of the implementation of the PoA to date has focused on the supply perspective. This approach has been somewhat short-sighted, as there are clear limitations to supply side only responses. Quite simply, if people do not feel secure in their homes and communities, they will not be willing to give up their arms, whether the option is legal for them or not. The challenge facing us today goes far beyond the weapons themselves and requires us to understand and address the reasons why individuals and societies feel compelled to acquire millions of new weapons each year.

Addressing demand and misuse issues is feasible and can involve focused measures, such as basic community development, school-based mentoring and community policing, programmes aiming to diversify job opportunities and societal-level efforts to reduce inequities and improve education. While the latter are in some regards fundamental challenges, it is important to note that the former are not particularly difficult and may well be more feasible than many supply side initiatives in communities and areas that are truly awash in weapons.

It is therefore necessary for Member States to support and develop evidence-based approaches to community violence prevention. They must integrate principles of human rights and international humanitarian law into a Code of Conduct for police, security forces and peacekeeping troops. Member States should promote training for civilians in peaceful conflict resolution. Moreover, they should involve local communities more actively in all disarmament programmes, in order to ensure the collection and destruction of SALW.

Member states should also actively support programming to increase security in refugee and IDP camps. They should plan for the special needs of women and children, particularly girl children, giving recognition and support for the multiple roles they play. And Member States should proactively institute DDR processes that recognise the specific needs of women and children, and that capitalise on and promote grassroots peace-building and disarmament initiatives of women and youth.

There is every reason to expect that addressing the supply and demand perspectives simultaneously would be mutually reinforcing in terms of reducing illicit transfers of small arms, and in reducing their impact on human security.

Action-Oriented Research

Another underdeveloped, yet vitally important, aspect of the PoA needing concerted international attention is the call for action-oriented research. Careful documentation and evaluation of violence prevention strategies through action-oriented research could provide the evidentiary basis upon which to determine what constitute best practices and to guide policy making of donor states and affected countries.

There is a great need to develop a knowledge base in this area and establish a repertoire of 'lessons learned'. Action-oriented research places the emphasis on intervening while systematically documenting the effects of an intervention. As such it is an ideal mechanism by which States, international organisations, and civil society can draw appropriate conclusions and policy guidance for the future.

Children and youth affected by armed conflict or other forms of organised violence remain particularly vulnerable. More in-depth knowledge and research on specific impacts and course of action to be taken is required.

We look forward to the Review Conference in 2006 and for the opportunity to amend and improve the Programme of Action.

In the interim, we must be reminded that if we do not change the current picture, hundreds of thousands of people will continue to die each year, and millions of others, particularly women and children, will continue to be victimised.

Thank you.