



Why Women?

Effective engagement for small arms control



Corey Barr with Sarah Masters

IANSA Women's Network
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About the IANSA Women's Network

The International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) is the global network of civil society organisations working in over 90 countries to stop the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons (SALW). The IANSA Women's Network is the only international network focused on the links between gender, women's rights, small arms and armed violence. It aims to make visible the disproportionate damage that women suffer from the availability and misuse of guns, raise the profile of the gender issue in the small arms debate and support women's organisations to reduce gun violence in their communities.

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Women volunteers dismantling ammunition at a military depot, Albania, 2003

Preface

"Advancing the cause of women, peace and security must be integral to our peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding efforts, not an afterthought. Today [...] is our chance to say, loud and clear: **Women Count for Peace.**"

Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations
10th anniversary of Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)

Ten years after the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), it is time, now more than ever, to build on the progress made and firmly secure a seat for women at the negotiating table. Women must become full-fledged participating members of the arms control and disarmament community, at all levels. Aside from the issue of equal representation, the international community stands to benefit tremendously from their unique perspective and experiences as women -- much like UN peace-keeping operations continuously learn from the positive impact of "women-only" blue helmet battalions.

I welcome IANSA's publication *Why women?* as the field research conducted by IANSA draws from an established yet discarded fact: beyond its direct

consequences, women are the ones who most often shoulder the indirect repercussions of war. Their status as victims however, is not the only reason why women matter. Times are changing and studies show that more and more women participate in armed forces. Women gangs are on the rise and women are increasingly crossing the gender divide to join the traditional perpetrators of armed violence. In fact one of the interviewees pointed out that there are, "A lot of women who *like* guns". Yet programmes, projects, peace and disarmament negotiations seldom involve women and very often fail to adequately address women's issues.

This publication aims at answering the shocking question asked by one delegate during the negotiations on the contents of UN General

Assembly Resolution 65/69 on, "Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control": **"Why women?"** Even more embarrassing was the silence of delegations, whether they were led by women or not. Should we be outraged? Should we blame it on ignorance, negligence or hidden agendas? No. This candid question simply demonstrates that the basic case has yet to be made.

Women's associations, activists and advocates have taken for granted a supposedly widespread acceptance of the contribution that women can make and have made to non-proliferation, arms limitation and disarmament. Nevertheless, the UN and civil society are still obliged to explain, to stress, to emphasise, time and again, the benefits of listening to, reading the works, and following the advice, of half of the world's population.

In my many years of multilateral peace and security work, I have often accentuated the value of partnerships when competence, experience and smart brains are pulled together to solve a problem. Similarly, many have heard me emphasise that "it would be bad business for anybody, UN, donors and private investors alike, to invest 100% of their resources in 50% of the population and hope for a 100% success rate." This, in my view, would be, "Tantamount to competing in the Soccer -or Cricket- World Cup Series with only half of your team on the field".



Gun buy-back poster, Argentina, 2008

This same half has, for decades now, included Heads of State and Government, Foreign Affairs and Defence Ministers, elected and appointed policy makers, legislators in national and local Parliaments, as well as Nobel Peace Prize laureates. This is also the same half that will be expected to support policies, implement laws, strengthen security and enhance stability in order to prevent conflicts, rebuild a country's society and economy after a bloody conflict, and altogether prevent and reduce armed violence.

This publication comes at a critical juncture to assist in the implementation of Resolution 65/69, an effort by the General Assembly to complement Resolution 1325 on "women peace and security". Resolution 65/69 aims at addressing more specifically the significance of women's contributions and positions in disarmament and arms limitation. In this resolution, the General Assembly has recognised "the essential contribution of women to practical disarmament measures [...] in the field of the prevention and reduction of armed violence, as well as conventional disarmament and arms control".¹

Last September, in her address to the General Assembly,² the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago was unambiguous and sent a strong message when she personally launched the initiative which later became UN Resolution 65/69. "There is no sustainable peace and security without the involvement and contribution of women. Trinidad and Tobago is committed to advancing the peace and security agenda of the UN. My country's attachment to the promotion of women is equally strong," the Prime Minister emphasised.

IANSA similarly has worked tirelessly to showcase the significance of the contribution of women members of civil society organisations and communities. Since its creation, IANSA has been a prime partner of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA). On field missions in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean, and in the margins of arms limitation and disarmament negotiations, engaging with IANSA personnel in



International Women's Day, Burundi, 2007

joint brainstorming sessions and projects has always proven to be extremely rewarding.

Inspired by my involvement in "Gender Guidelines in Mine Action", IANSA and UNODA's Regional Branch combined their field experiences to update the "Gender Guidelines of the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms (PoA)" to promote the inclusion of gender and women-specific elements in programming the fight against illicit small arms and light weapons. In the same spirit, IANSA cooperates increasingly with the UN regional centres, UNLiREC in particular, in training female law enforcement officials and security sector personnel to combat illicit small arms and light weapons.

Yet despite IANSA's tremendous efforts and the ever greater awareness of decision-makers in conflict-ridden and arms-affected areas, too often women are left on the sidelines of disarmament and peace negotiations. It is crucial, now more than ever, with the opportunities presented by the upcoming 2012 Review Conference of the PoA and negotiations on the Arms Trade Treaty, that civil society is supported in asserting the pivotal role of women in small arms control and disarmament. This publication is one more step towards the goal of engaging 50% of the world's population, and I congratulate IANSA for taking this bold initiative.

Agnès Marcaillou

Chief, Regional Disarmament Branch. UNODA



Patchwork quilt, Women in Black international gathering, Spain, 2008

Introduction

"I think that it's normal that women are involved in every activity which is connected to arms control because that's something which affects themselves and their families so much."³

Given the ongoing questions and challenges to women's participation in peace and security, this paper aims to show why it is important to include women in small arms control and disarmament initiatives by consolidating information and opinions from experts on gender and security issues. It is based on interviews with 17 practitioners from around the world as well as a review of relevant materials and documents. Background information on each of the interviewees can be found at the end of this paper. We first present a number of reasons for and examples why women's participation is important in the field of small arms control and disarmament. We then highlight some of the challenges to women's participation and provide some suggestions for overcoming them. This paper uses the terms small arms, guns and firearms interchangeably.

Involving those who are directly and indirectly affected

Women's participation in small arms control and disarmament is vital because women are affected by armed violence both directly and indirectly. The proliferation and use of small arms has different effects on men, women, boys and girls. Men and boys are killed and wounded by gun violence much more often than women and girls.⁴ In fact, global statistics show that over 90% of homicide victims are men, and that men made up 88% of the people who committed suicide with a gun in 2010.⁵ Additionally, men make up the majority of members of police, military and other armed forces and most owners and users of small arms are men and boys: "Weapons systems are designed mostly by men, marketed mostly for men and used mostly by men - and in many parts of the world, they are the primary source of death for men."⁶

While men and boys make up the majority of the users and direct victims of small arms, women are also impacted by arms proliferation and armed violence in gender-specific ways. In terms of direct threats to their security, small arms can facilitate and exacerbate violence against women and girls whether in conflict or in peace. As Jasmin Galace notes, "...even if they are not primarily gun wielders, their victimisation is facilitated with the aid of these weapons. They are the weapons of choice in domestic violence, in political violence and in sexual violence in armed conflict situations." This continuum of violence makes the difference between legal and illegal small arms virtually irrelevant since legal small arms are often used in domestic violence.

Numerous studies from countries around the world have documented how the presence of a firearm can significantly increase the chances that domestic violence results in a fatality.⁷ For example, in the United States research has shown that if there is a firearm in the house, the likelihood that intimate partner violence becomes lethal increases five-fold.⁸ Henri Myrntinen notes that, "The tragic irony of the concept of the armed male as a defender of the weak and helpless is that often women and children are far more likely to be killed by the male protector of the family and his weapon than by an outside intruder."⁹

In addition to being directly harmed by a gun, in many cases of domestic violence, guns are used to threaten an intimate partner. For example, a survey of women victims reporting family violence in Brazil¹⁰ and Portugal¹¹ showed that between 68.5% and 25% respectively of women said that they had been threatened with a gun. An additional 30% of the women surveyed did not know if there was a gun in their home and felt threatened because of the possibility that there was one. A study from Canada showed the gendered differences between men and women's sense of fear of armed violence revealing that 36% of men and 59% of women feared that they or someone in their household would be threatened or injured with a firearm.¹² From these statistics, it is clear that, "The psychological trauma of small arms, as well as their actual disruption of social cohesion and family safety, often impacts

women much more profoundly than men, given their roles in society and in the family and women's often limited access to policing and justice services."¹³

There is increasing legal precedent establishing domestic violence as a human rights violation, including at the domestic, regional and international levels. For example, in August 2011, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights found the United States responsible for human rights violations suffered more than a decade ago by Jessica Lenahan. In 1999, Lenahan's three daughters were abducted by her estranged husband. Lenahan repeatedly called and appealed to the police for help, but they dismissed her calls. Later her husband Simon Gonzales drove up to the police station and began shooting. During the shootout, Simon was killed and soon after the bodies of their three daughters were found shot to death in his truck. After losing a federal civil rights suit in 2005, Lenahan brought the case to the Inter-American Commission. The 2011 decision found that the United States had failed to discharge a duty to protect its nationals from domestic violence. The case has significant implications for holding states responsible for domestic violence.¹⁴

The proliferation of small arms also exacerbates the violence and threats of violence that women and girls experience in conflict situations. For example, in many conflict situations, small arms and light weapons have been used to threaten women and communities to facilitate the perpetration of sexual violence. Speaking about the role of small arms in the perpetration of rape in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Annie Matundu Mbambi noted that, "A guy with a machete in a village can rape one woman. Two guys, one with a machine gun, can rape the whole village."¹⁵ In some extreme cases, small arms have even been used as objects to directly perpetrate rape against both men and women.¹⁶

In addition to the ways in which small arms and light weapons are used to directly harm women and girls, there are also indirect effects of arms proliferation in conflict and post-conflict situations. Rita Santos notes that, "Women endure the long lasting effects of war: displacement, hunger,

disease, and often they become the main providers of the household since their male relatives are most likely to get killed or injured by war and by gun violence." Henri Myrntinen adds that women are also affected by armed violence when the men in their lives are killed or wounded saying, "Of course if men are affected by violence, that also has impacts on the family life, on women, on the mothers of the men who got wounded or killed or have killed themselves, on the sisters, on the wives, on the daughters. So it needs to be seen in this broader societal context and that means that women as much as men need to be involved."

In particular, women who are widowed due to gun violence face particular challenges. For example, Julia Knittel observes that in Nepal, "If you become a widow, you have no rights anymore. You're subject to abuse, you have no protection. If you have kids, you are on your own to take care of them because your relatives would not necessarily support you any longer. Without your husband you're not really considered a full person anymore."

The aspect of supply and demand of the arms trade should also be considered. Kristin Valasek suggests thinking about questions such as, "Who is making a profit off the arms trade? Who is working

in factories producing these weapons? What are the conditions that they're working under? Who is trading the weapons? Who is buying them, using them? Who is involved in making laws about them? And then of course who is involved in disarmament? And at all of those stages you can see that there's a differential impact and involvement of men and women." In thinking about women's participation in small arms control processes, all of these questions should be kept in mind to inform policy and decision-makers of how women are both differentially impacted and involved at each stage of both supply and control.

These various levels of impact underscore the strong argument that women should have a say in gun control initiatives because they are affected in numerous ways and at various levels by the presence of arms both in the home and in the community. As can be seen from the examples above, women experience the use of small arms in different ways than men and therefore should be included in order to better understand these different effects and how small arms control can address the negative effects on all members of a given society. The next section considers the ways in which women meaningfully participate in small arms control initiatives.

ქალები - შეთანხმებული
ძალადობის წინააღმდეგ!



საერთაშორისო კულტურულ-ჰუმანიტარული
კამპანია

კულტურულ-ჰუმანიტარული
ფონდი "სუხუმი"

Women Against
Gun Violence!



CAMPAIGN IS CARRIED OUT IN WESTERN GEORGIA

Cultural-Humanitarian
Fund "Sukhumi"



International Women's Day, Bangladesh, 2008

Recognising existing engagement and leadership

“Women should have a say because, in fact, they want to have a say.”¹⁷

Women's participation is important in small arms control and disarmament because women are often active in security issues informally and formally and at various levels. They have proposals and ideas on addressing armed violence. Research shows that women are more likely to support strong measures to control access to small arms and actually have, to date, played a major role in initiatives aimed at reducing the availability and misuse of weapons around the world.¹⁸

Local and national initiatives

Women have been involved in disarmament campaigns and gun buy-back programmes in many countries. For example, in Albania in the late 1990s, the proliferation of small arms created a great deal of insecurity in communities and in homes.

Women were being threatened by guns during domestic arguments. Additionally, their children were finding guns in the home and were being hurt due to accidents involving these guns. Women played an active role in raising awareness about the need for weapons collection and showed their strong capacity to influence social attitudes towards weapons. Furthermore, because the majority of men of working age had left their communities to find better economic opportunities, the women were left in the villages and knew where guns were stored or kept. Their experiences of how small arms actually increased their insecurity compelled women to hand in weapons belonging to their husbands or relatives, and persuade their family members, including children, to put down their weapons.¹⁹ Women were also active during Argentina's 2007-8 gun buy-back scheme. The programme allowed

anyone with a firearm to hand in weapons in exchange for cash and the firearms were then rendered unusable in front of the person who handed them in. Despite the lack of a gender perspective in national policies to address the small arms problem, women led the way. Though 95% of the gun owners in Argentina are men, 50% of the people who handed in guns were women suggesting that many guns owned by men were handed in by their wives or partners. The scheme resulted in the collection of 70,000 weapons and 450,000 rounds of ammunition between July 2007 and January 2008.²⁰ There were dual reasons behind this participation says Mélanie Régimbal, "To protect their homes, but also to protect their children or their husbands in ensuring that these weapons are no longer in the house, but also to protect themselves."

As can be seen from these examples, women's participation in small arms control processes has often been driven by concerns about the insecurity that the presence of guns created in their lives and their family's lives. Rita Santos says, "...they actually are used to historically having to deal with daily security concerns, daily peace issues, and they are usually driven by a very human focus or also a very practical approach and that's why I think it's also important to ensure the participation of women and of women's groups in small arms control initiatives."

Policy initiatives

At the policy level, women have been and continue to be involved in policy-making at the international and national levels. Rita Santos notes two examples of women activists and the work of women's groups on policy initiatives at the national level in Brazil. In 2003, women activists were very active in the process of drafting the national firearms legislation and advocated for the inclusion of a provision banning individuals with a history of family and domestic violence from being able to apply for, or obtain, a licence for gun use and ownership. Although these amendments were not included specifically in the law itself (the law only mentioned the inexistence of a criminal record as the main criteria) the awareness they raised formed part of

the campaign for a law on domestic violence more generally. In 2005 these women activists advocated for a law to criminalise domestic violence and for the inclusion of armed domestic violence in the provisions of The Maria da Penha Law. The Law provides a national framework for the prevention of violence against women.

Women have also been active in advocating for awareness-raising about and stronger implementation of existing measures. Rela Mazali spoke about the context in Israel where a lot of regulations exist, including a measure to remove small arms temporarily from a home if someone files a domestic violence complaint. While these measures do exist and to some extent are also being enforced, she says that there is no large-scale public consciousness about gun violence and the need for small arms control as an issue. She noted that this lack of awareness hinders the application of the laws and regulations. Rela and other women activists work to strengthen enforcement of existing laws and regulations instructing private security guards not to take their guns home after duty. She and her fellow activists hope to expand this discussion to the whole issue of small arms and arms control in civic space in Israel.

In Uganda in 2010, the Centre for Conflict Resolution (CECORE) and the East African Sub-regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI) organised a national workshop on armed domestic violence and the gender dimensions of armed violence. Participants included members of civil society, including women's organisations, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, media, and lawyers among others. One component of the workshop was to raise awareness of the country's National Action Plan on Small Arms and Light Weapons which provides a national framework for the development of activities on small arms by the government and civil society.²¹

However, there is often a gap between existing regulations and implementation. For instance, in the United States, there are existing laws on guns and domestic violence. Several federal laws,

including the 1994 Violent Crime Control and the 2005 Law Enforcement Act, state that individuals with restraining orders, including those related to domestic violence, should not be allowed to purchase or possess a firearm. There are similar laws at the state level with some providing law enforcement officials with the authority to remove guns when responding to domestic violence incidents. Other state-level laws empower courts to order alleged batterers to surrender their firearms through civil protective orders.

Where states are in compliance with federal law, the existence of these laws has the potential to make women safer. However, they are often not implemented and enforced and so women continue to be threatened, intimidated and killed in acts of family violence.²² Women continue to take a leading role at every stage of national policy-making, from advocating for the adoption of legislation and participating in the drafting of firearms and domestic violence laws, to raising awareness of existing regulations and working to improve implementation.

Women in the United States have also been active in working to raise awareness about federal and state laws. For example, in 2011 the Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV) held two online seminars to explain the enforcement of the new Firearms Bill 2010 (SF 2357) which prohibits a person from possessing a firearm if they are subject to a civil domestic abuse protective order or have been convicted of a misdemeanour crime of domestic violence.²³

At the international level

UN Programme of Action

The United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA)²⁴ was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2001 after negotiations at the 2001 UN Conference on Small Arms. The non-binding agreement covers many aspects of gun violence prevention, including recommendations on how

to reduce trafficking, proliferation and misuse of guns. Through the PoA, countries agree to report on implementation and to establish national coordination mechanisms to review and strengthen legislation, procedures and international cooperation.

Despite its comprehensive scope, the PoA contains only one reference to gender. In paragraph 6 of the Preamble states express grave concern about the devastating consequences of the illicit trade in small arms for children, "as well as the negative impact on women and the elderly."²⁵ The equation of women's experiences with children's experiences as well as the notion that women are only victims of small arms violence rather than powerful advocates and agents for change, remains a negative aspect of the PoA. Nevertheless, progress has been made in addressing gender in UN small arms control fora.²⁶ To clarify and strengthen these efforts, in 2010 the UNODA Regional Disarmament Branch together with IANSA developed a revised set of Guidelines²⁷ to highlight the importance of the perspectives of women, men, boys and girls impacted by the proliferation of small arms. The Guidelines provide examples of how to mainstream gender for the effective implementation of the PoA and refocus efforts based on new developments, progress made and lessons learned in the area of small arms as well as in the area of gender mainstreaming in peace and security more broadly.

In particular, the PoA has provided an opportunity for women's engagement at the national level. The PoA acknowledges the vital role of civil society and NGOs in assisting governments to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects.²⁸ In Kenya, for example, the 2010 country report on the PoA states that the Kenya National Focal Point works with civil society partners to promote information sharing.²⁹ Putting this into practice, the local government agreed to share information about their small arms inventory with women from the Frontier Indigenous Network in Wajir. Women were also invited to join a committee that will lead programmes raising awareness on small arms control.³⁰ In another example, in Paraguay in 2011 women activists

submitted a petition to the Minister for Women advocating for a comprehensive law to prevent, punish and eradicate violence against women and to include provisions to remove guns from perpetrators in cases of domestic violence.

Arms Trade Treaty

In December 2006, over 150 governments voted at the United Nations to start working to develop a global Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). IANSA is one of the founders of the Control Arms Campaign and calls for a global, legally binding agreement that will better control international transfers of conventional weapons and munitions. During 2010 and 2011, Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) meetings were held and the final negotiating conference is scheduled for July 2012. IANSA's work aims to ensure that the ATT has the means to reduce levels of gun violence and decrease the proliferation of small arms and ammunition. This can be achieved by the inclusion of strong and relevant provisions in the Treaty text and by including small arms and light weapons and related ammunition within the scope of the Treaty.

Members of the IANSA Women's Network have been active throughout the campaign raising the issue of women's rights and gender in relation to the ATT. During the 2010 and 2011 PrepCom meetings, IANSA women met with delegates to explain the importance of including women and gender issues

in arms control measures and why it should be included in the text of the Treaty. It is essential that measures to prevent gender-based violence and sexual violence against women are part of the ATT. To protect women's rights, the relevant binding international instruments covering gender-based violence, including rape and sexual violence, must be applied in arms transfer decisions. One concrete outcome that has come out of this advocacy has been the inclusion of gender in the preambular section of the Chair's draft non-Paper following discussions at the Third Preparatory Committee meeting in July 2011.

While women's participation at the local and national levels has had positive effects, their involvement usually happens in an informal way and women continue to be excluded from formal decision-making processes about peace and security issues, "While women may succeed in offering some input into decisions made at the local level over how small arms are managed, there is a danger that their ideas, experiences and wishes will not move beyond this informal sphere."³¹ Instead, women should be involved in all levels of arms control and disarmament processes, including informal as well as formal initiatives. Bringing women into formal processes as well as acknowledging and building on their informal work can help to ensure that different perspectives and experiences of gun violence are brought into peace and security processes.



IANSA women raising awareness in everyday life, 2008



Hakama women, Sudan, 2008

Taking into account the various roles promoting gun violence/undermining peace and security

"Girls go out with guys who use guns because they want a good life..."³²

On a more negative side, women also play a role in supporting gun cultures and the masculinities that valorise the ownership and use of a gun. For instance, in Brazil and Jamaica, many women gravitate toward gun-toting men for a sense of protection.³³ Research in Brazil and Portugal shows that some women perpetuate the idea that a man with a gun is sexy and desirable.³⁴ Additionally, women may feel that they can gain status through association with an armed man. For example, some women in Brazil's favelas receive a great deal of respect from their communities because of their contact with men with guns. Women may also be drawn to men with guns because they may feel that their personal security increases where men can protect them with small arms.³⁵

Women also have a role as gun carriers themselves. This can take many forms. For example, some

women in non-conflict societies own guns. Ray Acheson says, referencing women's gun ownership in the United States, "There have been some women that have come on behalf of the NRA [National Rifle Association] and their related groups to tell the UN that they should not be taking their guns away, because they need them for their own protection, which is kind of a startling experience." Where women do own small arms, there is often also a gendered division in the motivation behind the ownership. As Madeleine Rees reflects, "Men see guns as an extension of their power. Women see guns much more as a defensive mechanism... women have not traditionally used violence as a way of obtaining power and guns are an extension of that, and our relationship towards guns is therefore going to be different." This statement is backed up by a study from 1996 called *Guns in America* that

found that only 6.6% of American women owned a handgun, and nearly 85% of these said they were for self-defence.³⁶ Despite this, however, research shows that women rarely use handguns to kill in self-defence. For example, in 1998, for every time a woman used a handgun to kill in self-defence, 101 women were murdered with a handgun.³⁷

Women also participate as fighters in armed forces, defying stereotypes of the docile female and challenging the association between guns, power and masculinity. For example, women made up about 40% of the 19,000 Maoist cadres of the Maoist guerrillas in Nepal.³⁸ In Israel, there is mandatory conscription for secular Jewish women and women form about 14% of the US Army.³⁹ Research has also shown that in some cases, women make up a high number of members of gangs. National youth survey data from the United States and the United Kingdom suggest that girls and women account for 25% to 50% of all gang members respectively.⁴⁰ Women have different experiences as armed combatants whether in gangs or in armed forces, but despite this, as Marren

Akatsa-Bukachi says, "I've never heard anyone talking about the perspective of women who are gangsters...there's no perspective, there's nothing covered in the media."

There is a great deal of evidence that there are high levels of sexual and gender-based violence against women who participate in certain armed forces.⁴¹ Indeed, women bearing and using guns are frequently abused by the men who command them, making women simultaneously the perpetrators and victims of violence.⁴² As can be seen from the examples above, women and girls actively participate in many of the world's conflicts, either willingly, through coercion, economic pressure, or because they have been abducted and forced to serve as members of armed groups. Women's participation in small arms control and disarmament initiatives is important because of these different roles in actively participating in and indirectly supporting gun cultures, and because of these different roles, women can bring in different perspectives and knowledge of gun cultures and armed violence.



Nationwide consultations on the National Action Plan on 1325 and 1880, Nepal, 2010



Poster by Isis WICCE, Uganda

Better understanding the problem

"You can't deal with guns and small arms and light weapons without a gender perspective and get at their full meaning and their full impact,"⁴³

Peace and security are gendered

It is widely recognised that issues around peace and security, including armed violence and small arms, are highly gendered. As noted above, violence has different direct and indirect effects on men, women, boys and girls. As Rela Mazali reflects, "There are specificities of gender with relation to small arms...violence is perceived as gendered and presented as gendered...guns are very gendered and are considered to be part of or related to or an expression of masculinity and to be foreign from femininity...there are these different positionings vis-à-vis small arms and both need to be taken into consideration in working on what needs to happen and what needs to change." The 2011 UN Secretary General's Report on Small Arms also emphasises the gendered nature of armed violence noting

the disproportionate involvement of young men in armed attacks and as direct victims. The report also notes the direct and indirect impacts on women and children, particularly in terms of the consequences of armed violence at the family level.

Different perceptions of security

Men, women, girls and boys have different perceptions of security and of what constitutes a threat to their security. For example, in a study on women's role in weapons for development projects in Albania, Cambodia and Mali, Shukuko Koyama found that men justified their possession of weapons by their sense of physical insecurity, with external security threats being the main worry. Women, on the other hand, perceived their family and neighbours as the sources of their insecurity.

These different perceptions of security resulted in differentiated experiences of the weapons collection programmes. Koyama's research showed that men handed over their weapons when they felt secure and confident in the government. Women on the other hand did not report a change in their perception of security after the weapons collection programme, saying that the insecurity persists at local and domestic levels after weapons collection took place.⁴⁴ This shows that while generally fewer guns often means more security for women, where arms control efforts focus on illegally possessed small arms, the legal possession of guns in the home can continue to be a source of insecurity for women.

A continuum of violence

Integrating gender perspectives and understandings of violence into arms control work is necessary in conflict and non-conflict affected situations. Cynthia Cockburn stresses the importance of understanding violence as a continuum along several dimensions. There is a time dimension, such that violence runs through moments of peace and moments of war, including periods of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) in societies immediately after armed conflict. There are also links between different types of violence, such as how war exacerbates sexual violence, and how the structural violence of oppression may give rise to armed uprisings. Cockburn argues that understanding the 'continuum effect' in violence enables us to seek out possibilities for interrupting the continuum. By intervening at one point in the sequence, we may be able to reduce violence at another.

Including diverse perspectives for more comprehensive solutions

It is important to understand these unique effects and experiences and to include the perspectives of different groups in small arms control and disarmament initiatives. By doing so, programmes, policies and projects can address armed violence and the proliferation of small arms more comprehensively. As noted by Ray Acheson, "It's all about perspective for me. Whether it's bringing in a

gender perspective or different kinds of diversity... it's having more than one type of voice speaking that's really important to me...as both victims and perpetrators...women have a unique relationship to both aspects, different than men, because of course men actually are the number one victims and the number one users, but it's a different sort of relationship to the gun."

As noted in the 2011 UN Secretary General report, which highlights the need to include gender considerations in arms control initiatives, "If the gendered aspects of armed violence – including the male social roles that often shape armed violence and the structural subordination of women and girls in larger society – are not addressed, some of the key root causes of armed violence and its various impacts on girls, boys, women and men might be neglected."⁴⁵ Marren Akatsa-Bukachi notes that, "If women were involved, I think that there would be a different perspective, a different approach, different suggestions on how to handle the gun issue differently."

Research has shown that women generally have more negative attitudes towards small arms than men and have shown greater levels of commitment to measures to reduce their misuse and proliferation.⁴⁶ Speaking about Libya, Vanessa Farr noted, "I bet if you spoke to women about what they think is going on, they'd have all sorts of really interesting opinions and once those opinions were made public, this notion that males own guns and guns own males and only men can talk about guns and use them would become thoroughly challenged and then new spaces would be opened in which a different kind of discourse could happen." Giving women the space to participate in arms control and disarmament initiatives can help to democratise peace and security, providing opportunities for different perspectives and ideas to be taken into account.



DZRB radio interview with Jasmin Galace, the Global Week of Action against Gun Violence, The Philippines, 2011

Making programmes more effective

"If we are part of the problem, we have to be part of the solution."⁴⁷

Women's participation in small arms control and disarmament initiatives can help to make projects and programmes more effective. Women have unique perspectives that can strengthen project planning and implementation efforts. Because of this women's perspectives should be integrated in project design from the beginning notes Shukuko Koyama, "...in order to get at needs, to improve security and safety in the communities, we need to hear our clients, beneficiaries, so first women's involvement is very, very important to do the right needs assessment."⁴⁸

One example is Liberian women's involvement in the DDR process. In 2003, the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) led the process of disarming over 35,000 combatants and brought into Liberia practitioners considered to be experts on DDR from Kosovo and Sierra Leone. Proposals to participate in the DDR process from women's organisations were rejected because they were not considered "experts". Within

two days, the DDR process was chaotic and failing. UNMIL called in the Women in Peacebuilding Program (WIPNET) to help support their work in the camps. WIPNET used the opportunity to link the DDR process to Resolution 1325. Over 55 women volunteered and organised trips into rebel areas to disseminate information and spend time with community leaders to explain the DDR process. Combatants responded positively and joined the DDR process and recognised and respected the work of women who knew the national context and were from their local communities.⁴⁹

As noted earlier, women's participation in the weapons collection in Argentina was very high particularly given the low rates of women's gun ownership. This was the result of a campaign effort that targeted women. This effort was found to be much more successful than campaigns that mainly targeted a male audience. "The international assistance community needs to grasp women's

actual capacity and potential in the implementation of weapons collection projects. In order to make micro-disarmament more effective, it is crucial to devise policies that utilise this capacity and potential as much as possible. In this sense, gendered programming of weapons collection is not a matter of political correctness, but a matter of practicality.⁵⁰ As can be seen from some of these examples of women's participation in small arms control processes, women often play an important role in either convincing men to hand in their weapons or in handing in weapons themselves. Nic Marsh reflects that, "If you have a household that has a gun, the women are extremely important in determining what is done with that gun."

The integration of women in peacekeeping missions has also shown some positive results. For instance, reports about the United Nations all-female peacekeeping contingent in Liberia have shown that the presence of the women police officers encourage Liberian women to not only register complaints, but to actually join the Liberian police force themselves. Dorcas Zebada notes that this has made security services and participation in security processes more accessible to ordinary women. The participation of women themselves can enhance programme and project results and can also strongly determine what men do with their weapons. As Agnes Marcaillou has noted, "It is

not about feminism, it is about business. Member states give us money to implement projects, and if I implement a project that only affects 50 per cent of the population, that is bad business."⁵¹

There is a general conception that women do not have a great deal of knowledge about small arms and therefore do not have a place in control processes or planning and implementation. However, as Vanessa Farr says, "Of course, when you talk to women about them they know exactly what guns do, where they are, they know where they're stored...and they often are pretty good at being able to convince men to put arms down."

Shukuko Koyama cites her experience in Cambodia where women played key roles as informants during weapons collection programmes because they used to be in charge of keeping arms in hidden places and helped to map out the existence of weapons still hidden in the jungle. In Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, women, particularly older women, have been able to use their social status to push men into peace agreements says Henri Myrtilinen. In some cases this meant convincing men to put down their weapons and work together with the authorities to settle their differences and in some cases literally standing between the two parties in a standoff and demanding that they put down their weapons.



Montage from national events, The Philippines, 2008-2010

Democratising peace and security

"The democratisation of discussions of security is one of the most fundamental things that we can do in order to make the world safe from the prolific arms that exist in it right now."⁵²

In most countries, women make up at least half of the population. Because of this, it is also important to include women in arms control and disarmament initiatives simply as a matter of democratising peace and security processes. As stated by Vanessa Farr, "I think the more people talk about all aspects of arms, their impacts, their effects, what they're used for, how they're misused, how they shore up particular gendered and raced and classed, etc. types of power, the more those conversations are democratised, the broader the participation is in what security really means, the better able we are to convince people that arms control is necessary and useful and not an intrusion."

In a vicious cycle, the presence of prolific numbers of arms can hinder democratic processes and the participation of women in various aspects of peace and security, including participation in the area of small arms control. Speaking about the

Israeli context, Rela Mazali says, "I think an actual democracy cannot exist under the threat of arms if it's a serious threat to whatever group within that democracy. And if that's the case, then different groups need to have distinct voices and a distinct say and women are half of our society and are definitely disproportionately threatened in their homes by small arms. So their say and their, not only input, but influence, on arms control decision-making processes are vital to anything that could begin to call itself democratic."

In addition, the importance of women's participation in peace and security generally and conventional arms control specifically has been emphasised in various international and national standards and documents. For example, Resolution 1325 emphasises the importance of women's participation in the building of peace and human security. Resolution 1325 has triggered a great

deal of advocacy, awareness-raising, and attempts at implementation at various levels and steps have been taken to better involve women in various peace and security processes, such as peace negotiations and peacekeeping missions. Despite the clear linkages, Resolution 1325 does not specifically mention small arms control, "Although small arms proliferation is an underlying threat to the successful implementation of the resolution, explicit links are often not made. It is as if the presence of small arms is inevitable, somehow unavoidable and this prevents them from being recognised as facilitators of human rights violations, tools of intimidation, dominance and violence."⁵³ While there is increasing incorporation of Resolution 1325 in small arms control initiatives and vice versa, making these connections is still an area that needs more work.

Despite the lack of mention of small arms in Resolution 1325 and gender in the PoA, other international documents and reports have made the connection. For example, a 1997 Resolution from the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice recognised the need to strengthen regulations on firearms in order to address violence against women.⁵⁴ Additionally, the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development makes connections between gender issues and armed violence. The Declaration, which was first adopted in 2006 and is now endorsed by over 100 states, includes a provision that the signatories will work at national, regional and multilateral levels, "To promote a comprehensive approach to armed violence reduction issues, recognising the different situations, needs and resources of men and women, boys and girls, as reflected in the provisions of Resolutions 1325 and 1612."⁵⁵ These standards as well as other international documents reflect that there is growing recognition at the international level of the connections between small arms control and the women, peace and security agenda.

More recently, gender has been raised as an important issue during Preparatory Committee meetings for the ATT. During the second and third meetings in 2011, gender was raised by many states in the discussions, including Australia, Mali, Nigeria,

Norway, Trinidad and Tobago, and Spain. These states have supported the argument for an ATT that addresses gender-based violence in accordance with existing international commitments, including Resolution 1325 and the other UN Security Council Resolutions on women, peace and security.⁵⁶ Additionally, several other states, including Fiji, Grenada, Kenya, Saint Lucia, and Trinidad & Tobago have advocated for the inclusion of gender in other areas of the Treaty, including in the principles, goals and objectives, criteria and victim assistance sections.⁵⁷

As mentioned in the preface, in September 2010 during the 65th General Assembly meeting, Trinidad and Tobago announced that it would introduce in the First Committee on Disarmament and International Security a resolution on women, disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation. Presented by the first woman Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, H.E. Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the resolution (A/RES/65/69) was adopted by consensus. It includes provisions "Recognising that the participation of both men and women is essential for the attainment of sustainable peace and security" and also, "The valuable contribution of women to practical disarmament measures carried out at the local, national, regional and subregional levels in the prevention and reduction of armed violence and armed conflict, and in promoting disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control..." The adoption of the resolution marked the first time that the General Assembly formally addressed the links between women and disarmament.⁵⁸ It also showed Trinidad and Tobago's strong commitment to women's inclusion in the context of international security, including small arms control. Despite this admirable leadership and considerable progress, challenges remain and it is clear that much more needs to be done to effectively and meaningfully include women in peace and security processes.



Workshop with Constituent Assembly Members, Nepal, 2011

Challenges

While it is clear from the reasons listed above that women's participation in small arms control and disarmament is critical, women face a number of challenges that serve to hinder their participation in this and other areas of peace and security. These challenges can be broken down into five main categories: challenges relating to women's situational positioning; exclusion from legislation and policies; those related to discourse and action around arms control; lack of knowledge; and the sidelining of gender.

Unequal positioning

The most fundamental challenge to women's participation in small arms control and disarmament is their unequal positioning in patriarchal societies which hinders their abilities to participate in political affairs more generally. This is particularly true in relation to issues of peace and security says Professor Dr. Vesna Nikolić-Ristanović, "The main challenge...is because that's considered a male area and women are in a way treated as non-

competent and I think it's particularly the case in a society like the Serbian society which is quite patriarchal and there is a very decisive connection between arms and masculinity so very often people would say what do you know about these kinds of things." Relatedly, Julia Knittel notes that women's participation in security matters often challenges traditional gender roles, "...it's very much associated with masculinities, strength. For a woman to get engaged in small arms, she would challenge her role as a docile, friendly housewife and in order to do that, she needs allies."

Exclusion from legislation and policies

Because of these general beliefs and traditional gender roles, women tend not to be allowed the space to participate in discussions around security measures and policies. In many cases, gender and women's issues are also excluded in security discussions and legislation says Jasmin Galace, "...some cultural beliefs and practices do not allow the inclusion of women and their experiences

and perspectives in consultations and dialogues. Women's participation is limited in formal spaces like peace negotiations where gender issues are not seen as an integral part of the peace agenda. There are also cultural and religious practices that assign secondary or marginal roles to women which women have unfortunately internalised, believing that their role in society, is indeed, secondary and marginal."

There are also contextual factors that limit women's participation in small arms control as well as more broadly. Speaking from her experience in Nepal, Julia Knittel notes that, "The lack of economic empowerment, the structural causes, no education. Many women actually are still in a refugee situation since their husbands disappeared or were murdered so that they don't even have the time or the resources to think about something like that... Many of them are so poor that they don't know what to eat in the evening, so they don't really have time and resources to start thinking about politics and campaigns." Women's participation is linked to their social and economic rights and well-being as well as the space within political institutions. Madeleine Rees observes, "It is about women's ability to be in positions where they can participate in areas which require or are seen to require a particular expertise and this is always going to be an area where women are going to be excluded just from the patriarchal standpoint. This has a great deal to do with the social and economic basis within states which has an impact on the ability of women to participate in governance structures. These then become exclusive and then within these political structures, some are even more exclusive. So defence, security, arms trade for example have always been a male preserve and so women are just not engaged."

In addition to social and economic impediments, women may be faced with violence and threats of violence and may not be able to safely participate in security discussions. When security discussions are removed from and don't take into account the reality of women's situations on the ground, it can make these decisions less effective in addressing security matters, including security issues surrounding women's participation in security processes. Speaking

from his experience working with UN entities, Bob Zuber reflected that, "I think sitting here in the UN... we become a little bit insensitive to what in many societies women have to endure, both themselves and their families, in order to take their rightful place at the table. Part of the small arms, light weapons specifically, but also the larger security sector question is, what are the minimum requirements that are necessary in the security sector so that women can have a reasonable expectation of participation without a violent backlash?"

Related to political institutions and discussions, there is the issue of legislation that takes women, women's issues, and a gender perspective into account. "I think that one of the big challenges is still ensuring that the policies and the legislation and the norms that are passed by states take these issues into consideration... You can have as many females as you want on the tribunal, you can have all the policies that you want to develop, but if your law doesn't take these types of issues into consideration, doesn't adopt a "do no harm approach" then it can have the effect of one step forward and two steps back," says Mélanie Régimbal. While women's participation in legislative bodies is important, it is critical to realise that the presence of women in a policy-making body does not automatically ensure that women's issues or a gender perspective is integrated into policies and legislation.

Marginalisation of the human aspect in action and discourse

Current action and discourse around small arms control and disarmament serve in specific ways to limit and restrict women's participation. For instance, much of the discourse surrounding small arms control is focused on technical issues such as firearms transfers, firearms ownership, trade, stock management issues, firearms marking, and tracing mechanisms. While these technical issues are very important, Rita Santos notes that, "The focus on arms marking and tracing mechanisms often marginalises the human aspect of gun violence and gun use and misuse which is usually the main entry point of women and women's groups and I think that's the

main challenges that women face in terms of their involvement in arms control." Vanessa Farr adds that, "This generalised and very male technological machismo particularly around guns...makes it a very difficult field for women to have any perspectives on. It's a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy, this stereotype that women don't know anything about guns therefore we don't need to tell them anything about disarmament or the control of small arms."

The technical nature of the small arms control discourse also affects where the issue is discussed. Marren Akatsa-Bukachi says that in East Africa, small arms control is considered a matter of military security and that, "Whereas we are looking at it from the perspective of human security, our governments are looking at it from the perspective of the military and military issues are confidential. Therefore, they don't really make the link between the militarisation and the human security perspective...So that's a challenge, just having that perspective, the visual, that there are human beings being affected by these arms and not just guns." She went on to talk about the differences between the hard issues and the soft issues of gun control, "The hard issues are the hardware. The soft issue is the humanity and that humanity is still not being taken seriously. That is really a challenge, to make the key players or the stakeholders take the human aspect seriously and give it the due recognition that it deserves."

This marginalisation of the human aspect, including the effects gun violence has on individuals, can serve to make the issue abstract says Henri Myrntinen, "...this sort of technical gender neutrality serves to sideline women's issues and the special needs of women and girls, but also those of men. What struck me when I was taking part in this... small arms conference...was that, apart from my intervention at the end of the second day, nobody had mentioned people in any way. There were just these abstract small arms and these abstract bullets that then caused bad things in societies, but there was no mention whatsoever of people with agency, the people who produce the weapons, who buy the weapons, who carry the weapons, decide to put a bullet into the barrel and pull the trigger... that was completely taken out of it. It was seen as

very much a technical issue and I think that kind of an approach means that especially women's and girl's issues tend to be sidelined and the connection between the technical issues and actual people's lives often is just not made."

A vicious cycle: lack of knowledge and exclusion

The technical discourse as well as women's lack of economic empowerment and lack of resources in many situations also negatively impacts women's preparedness to engage effectively in security discussions. Speaking from her experience with New Profile, Relä Mazali said that, "I believe that it's true anywhere still that women are often deskilled in public presentation, public appearances, speaking, debating, arguing opinions, and they're also largely perceived by the media as an obstacle and by popular opinion as less knowledgeable, as less serious, not to be taken so seriously." This can also happen at the governmental level where women's ministries may choose to not take part in national security decision-making bodies because of lack of resources and perceived lack of knowledge, says Kristin Valasek, "If you're working on gender issues, you're supposed to cover everything, but at the same time, there's a real hesitancy among women's organisations and within government agencies focused on gender issues to really talk about security because they feel like they don't have the capacity. There is a history of mistrust of the realm of national security, especially security sector institutions. It's seen as a highly technical issue and women and gender actors sometimes don't prioritise participation in these discussions."

Sideline gender

There are also challenges in terms of knowledge of Resolution 1325 and gender issues in institutions working on small arms control and disarmament initiatives. For instance, while Resolution 1325 squarely places the issue of gender and women's issues in the area of security, there has been some hesitation expressed about raising the issue of gender in the First Committee of the General Assembly. By sidelining gender and women's issues in this and other international security forums,

there is an implicit undermining of the purpose of Resolution 1325. This poses the risk of passing the responsibility for women's and gender issues reflects Ray Acheson: "...anytime you mention gender or women, people think it's either dealt with by one of those Security Council Resolutions or by another committee or body in the UN system, but it's not disarmament, it's not security, it's not arms control." Indeed, several Member States have expressed the opinion that gender and women's issues should instead be considered a human rights issue for discussion in the Third Committee on Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Affairs.

However, in the First Committee and in other forums for international security discussions, gender and women's rights issues and perspectives should be taken into account for all of the reasons stated above, particularly because women's perspectives can make small arms control initiatives more relevant and successful. The link between small arms and gun violence, and their impact on women's rights and gender issues should also be considered in the Third Committee since these impacts including gender-based violence against women are human rights violations.

Where gender has been included in policies, programmes and projects, there are still in some cases challenges in the ways that gender and women's issues are being integrated and understood in implementation, says Mélanie Régimbal, "I think that we still have challenges in ensuring that programmes don't just talk about gender perspectives, but actually implement gender perspectives in a sustainable manner." Nic Marsh adds that there are additional challenges when gender is not mainstreamed, but instead is relegated to the responsibility of a gender advisor or something of that nature, "...while capital cities are for the most part OK with Resolution 1325, it's very difficult to actually get those sorts of things implemented on the ground. So very often you find that you will have someone, usually women, appointed to a role to try to improve participation. It's very easy for that person to be marginalised and for people not to take them seriously." A related challenge is that many times women's and gender issues are seen as only women's concerns and not something that men can have opinions on, advocate for, or be involved in. Gender should be addressed as a cross-cutting theme throughout programmes and projects with men as well as women championing gender equality.

The IANSA Women's Network



Areas for action

Despite the deep-rooted and widespread challenges that women face in participating in small arms control and disarmament initiatives, there are ways that women and men can work together to enhance and bolster women's participation in this and other areas of peace and security.

Education

Some of the main ways revolve around education and training. As Dorcas Zebada notes, "Education is the best way for women and men to work together in the field of small arms control and by working together, we can bring actually equality and representation of women and men in peacebuilding and reconstruction and work together also towards promoting women's expertise in small arms issues." Similarly Rela Mazali reflects, "Ideally,

it would be through education, there would be a kind of education given to both men and women, differentially adapted and sensitive to the different skills each gender tends to lack so as to participate in democracy." Education that is not necessarily related to the topic of small arms and security directly can help women to better engage. Kristin Valasek suggested that education and training initiatives could include everything from literacy training, computer training and training on how to analyse documents, to training on advocacy.

Advocacy and awareness-raising

Education is linked to advocacy and awareness-raising, another crucial aspect of increasing women's participation. Dorcas Zebada notes that men and women can work together, "To actually

develop awareness-raising programmes for communities to let them know about the impact of small arms in the society and also work together with men and women for the promotion of greater participation and involvement of women at all levels including in the police, in the government, at all levels in a society.” Awareness-raising and advocacy should be targeted at multiple levels and should have a variety of messages. One area identified for further advocacy is showing the actual effects of the proliferation of small arms, suggests Madeleine Rees, “A lot of campaigning is needed, a lot of awareness, because...you still see the arms trade fairs coming up on TV as something really good...You never see this is what this can do. Have you seen the effects of this bullet going through a child’s chest? That’s the sort of thing that we need to be getting out there so we actually get a grip of what is real and what is being shown to us through the media.” Global Action to Prevent War and Armed Violence note that it is important to identify women who are already working in areas that contribute to the security sector, although are not necessarily identified as having traditional positions within the security framework. Helping them to recognise their role and its importance will help to build and strengthen the role of women in security discussions.

Advocacy to ensure that the issue remains at the forefront of the disarmament agenda

Awareness-raising should focus on forums where the issue has not been raised, but advocacy should also continue to ensure that the issue of women’s participation is not pushed to the backburner, states Mélanie Régimbal. “We have to keep putting the issue at the forefront of the disarmament agenda,” and then we have to make sure it stays on the agenda. She adds, “I think that that will be one of the main challenges for us collectively that it stays there and that it stays there not just in a form of lip service, but with clear implementation strategies.” Different advocacy strategies are needed for keeping the issue on the disarmament agenda and for ensuring that it

is raised and discussed in different forums. For example, bringing women from conflict-affected areas to international disarmament meetings can be very powerful, says Ray Acheson, “I think that increasing the visibility of women and ensuring that they are the ones directly conveying what’s happening and what they think the solution is to delegates...at the UN has been greatly important.” This is a key area of work for the IANSA Women’s Network which sponsors and supports women from around the world to participate in advocacy and lobbying, such as addressing delegates at UN events and side events.

Technical training for women

As identified in the challenges above, the technical language that pervades through the field of small arms control affects how the issue is interpreted in terms of the human impact of the proliferation of arms. This language can also serve to exclude women in certain contexts and hamper their participation in debates on arms control. One way to address this challenge is through technical training on small arms control, such as marking and tracing. Vanessa Farr notes, “I think women knowing more about weaponry and its control is one of the most important ways of breaking down stereotypes that it is men that know about and own guns and women who have no opinions on them. So the better informed women are, the more women are able to talk in a knowledgeable and articulate way about the need to control arms, the more effective all arms control programmes are likely to be and the more sustainable they are going to be because it implies a whole community participation.” This point was also brought up during the 2011 Open-ended Meeting of Governmental Experts on the Implementation of the PoA with IANSA suggesting that women should be trained alongside their male counterparts in order to identify weapons and actively participate in investigations, tracing efforts and contribute to data collection.⁵⁹ In addition to being the recipients of trainings, women’s organisations can be engaged in the development of training programmes to ensure that women’s perspectives as users and victims of small arms are reflected in training programmes.⁶⁰

Support for women's groups and groups working on gender equality

More can also be done to support women's groups and groups working on gender equality and security issues. As highlighted above, there are already many initiatives going on at various levels led by women and involving women in security issues. Recognising these initiatives and working to support women doing this work is another suggestion. Another issue in this area is making connections between areas of work that activists are already doing. For instance, as has been highlighted, there is often a divide between women's rights activism and activism focused on small arms control by women and women's organisations. One concrete example is that while there are many organisations working on gender-based violence in conflict situations, the link is not necessarily explicitly made to the weapons that facilitate and exacerbate this violence. Similarly, there are many organisations working to prevent domestic violence but the issue of armed domestic violence and the threats posed by guns in the home is often overlooked. One way of strengthening both areas of work is to make these links to address armed violence against women in a comprehensive and hopefully preventative way.

Also, changes should be made to the current funding system, says Bob Zuber, "At the end of the day, we tend to act more like competitors than collaborators and that's as true in the women's movement as it is outside the women's movement." Finding ways to effectively fund and support women's participation and to support collaboration between organisations is a key area for future efforts. Additionally, creating forums for bringing together different audiences to talk with each other can be useful. For example, "Bringing together personnel from the ministry of defence, ministry of interior, and the ministry response for gender issues and women's organisations in a workshop can provide a place for sharing information and encouraging participation and collaboration on security issues," says Kristin Valasek.

Work on masculinities

Another important area of work is working with men and women to address masculinities that valorise the possession and use of weapons and, in some cases, violence against women. As noted by Julia Knittel about her work in Nepal, "I have the impression that most efforts right now...also related to small arms focus very much on empowering on changing women's role, but at least here, just as much what we need is challenging men's role and redefining men's role." Jasmin Galace clarifies that in working with men, "The goal is not to win over them but to win them to the cause. I believe so firmly in a UNESCO statement that 'if wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defence of peace must be constructed.' Men are also victims of cultural constructions. We just have to help in the deconstruction as well as the cultural constructions...When men have turned into partners and allies, then together we could help overcome obstacles to women's participation in small arms control and in peacebuilding." Rita Santos notes that it is also important to consider that while men make up the majority of gun users, this does not mean that the majority of men use guns. There is a need pay closer attention to the lives and experiences of men and boys who refuse to adhere to the violent version of masculinity or who after some life changing experiences decide to cease their involvement with gun violence.

Drawing attention to non-violent male attitudes and masculinities is important to demystify and break the links between masculinity and violence. As noted by a 2009 IANSA publication, "...violent masculinity is not inevitable. By challenging gender norms with both men and women, an alternative non-violent masculinity can emerge as a positive choice for men."⁶¹ It can also help to construct more gender-balanced and healthy relationships between men and women.



Global Week of Action against Gun Violence, India, 2008

Conclusion

For some, answers to the question “why women?” in the area of small arms control may seem obvious or straightforward. However, recent events, such as negotiations on General Assembly Resolution 65/69, show that perhaps the multitude of answers to this question can be easily overlooked if women and women's advocates don't make them abundantly clear, that perhaps we have taken women's participation for granted and assumed that it was clear why women's participation is important. This paper has aimed to draw together evidence and perspectives on the “established and discarded fact” of why women should be involved in small arms control. Rather than presenting new evidence, the paper has highlighted the multitude of research and work being done in the field as well as the opinions of experts to reemphasise how women are already involved in small arms control initiatives and how their efforts can and should be supported and reinforced.

As we move into a crucial year for the small arms control movement in 2012 with the Review

Conference on the PoA and negotiations on an Arms Trade Treaty taking place, now more than ever is the time to acknowledge the number and diversity of women who are engaged in small arms control and disarmament initiatives, and recognise their contributions. We must also work to better connect and coordinate advocacy movements that may run in parallel to each other, such as those working to end violence against women and those working to help prevent armed violence against women from within the field of small arms control. Connecting these advocacy agendas can reinforce the work of each movement and can help to address these issues in a more comprehensive and holistic manner. Together, we can ensure that the impacts of small arms on women are fully and completely addressed, and that women have full and equal participation and voice in the security matters affecting them. Our experience to date shows that when we support each other, when we remain persistent and confident, things can and do change. In the words of Justine Kwachu Kumche of Women in Alternative Action in Cameroon, “We go forward!”

Biographies of Interviewees

Ray Acheson is the Project Director of Reaching Critical Will, a project of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) which works toward the abolition of nuclear weapons, total and universal disarmament, the reduction of global military spending, and demilitarisation of politics and society. Prior to this position, she was an intern and research assistant for the project. Ray previously worked with the Institute for Defense and Disarmament Studies and was the associate editor of the 2006 and 2007 editions of the Arms Control Reporter. Ray graduated from the University of Toronto with a BA Honours in Peace and Conflict Studies.

Marren Akatsa-Bukachi is the Chief Executive Officer of the Eastern Africa Sub-Regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI). The organisation works to facilitate follow-up on the Beijing and African Platform of Action in order to enhance the advancement of women and social justice. The organisation initiated a gender analysis of the National Action Plans on Small Arms from Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania and has been active in capacity building and holding training courses to train national focal points on small arms in the East Africa region. Previously, Marren worked for the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Nairobi and at the Institute for Education in Democracy.

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Endnotes

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Why Women? Effective engagement for small arms control

Given the ongoing questions and challenges to women's participation in peace and security, this publication aims to show why it is important to include women in small arms control and disarmament initiatives by consolidating information and opinions from experts on gender and security issues. It is based on interviews with 17 practitioners from around the world as well as a review of relevant materials and documents. It first presents a number of reasons for and examples why women's participation is important in the field of small arms control and disarmament. It then highlights some of the challenges to women's participation and provides some suggestions for overcoming them.

"Advancing the cause of women, peace and security must be integral to our peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding efforts, not an afterthought. Today [...] is our chance to say, loud and clear: **Women Count for Peace."**

BAN KI-MOON, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS ON
THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1325 (2000)

"This publication aims at answering the shocking question asked by one delegate during the negotiations on the contents of UN General Assembly Resolution 65/69 on, 'Women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control' *"Why women?"* Even more embarrassing was the silence of delegations, whether they were led by women or not. Should we be outraged? Should we blame it on ignorance, negligence or hidden agendas? No. This candid question simply demonstrates that the basic case has yet to be made."

AGNÈS MARCAILLOU, CHIEF OF THE REGIONAL DISARMAMENT BRANCH, UNODA

The IANSA Women's Network is the only international network focused on the connections between gender, women's rights, small arms and armed violence.

We are grateful to the Government of Norway and to Oxfam Novib for their support.

