

NATIONAL AND LOCAL PERSPECTIVES ON PREVENTING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE THROUGH ARMS CONTROL

DRC

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THE LINK BETWEEN THE PROLIFERATION OF SALW AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

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The Democratic Republic of Congo remains acutely afflicted by gender-based violence linked to the trafficking of small arms and light weapons (SALW). The proliferation and circulation of light weapons fan the flames of armed violence and exacerbate sexual violence and gender-based violence (GBV), criminality and insecurity. The DRC is surrounded by nine contiguous countries with very porous borders. Despite the 2003 embargo decreed by the UN Security Council, weapons move across borders through neighbouring countries.

Throughout armed conflicts that disturbed the eastern part of the DRC, tens of thousands of women and girls suffered rapes and sexual assaults, systematically perpetrated at gunpoint by armed groups.

Gender-based violence is a matter of peace and security. It is also an issue of human rights and development. Weapons are consistently used as a symbol of power, authority, and their persistent availability contributes to escalating conflicts. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons jeopardises women's ability to participate in conflict resolution, elections, governance and post-conflict reconstruction processes. The proliferation of SALW also brings to light the erosion of human security, injustice, human rights violations, and the rising illicit trade of natural resources generated through the use of arms.¹

Therefore, it is possible to assert that the inadequate management of arms transfers by each and every stakeholder, in the context of circumstances related to gender-based violence, has to this day resulted in the following consequences: deportations of women and girls for the purpose of sexual slavery, early marriages, increased numbers of unwanted children, widespread contamination and use of HIV/AIDS as weapons of war, emergence of child soldiers, increased illiteracy, internal population displacements without assistance, destruction of basic social infrastructures (maternity, hospitals, schools, roads), destruction of the ecosystem, dislocation of families, stigmatisation of women who experienced sexual abuse and a growing number of women who head households as men are being slaughtered, etc.²

On 20 July, 2006, the DRC adopted a law, Loi N°06/018, and in 2010 the *Stratégie Nationale de Lutte contre les Violences Sexuelles Basées sur le Genre* (SNLVBG) [National Strategy against all forms of Gender-Based Violence]. Unfortunately, gender-based violence is often widely and systematically used against civilians during armed conflicts, although its scope is largely underestimated and the connection to weapons proliferation ignored. In the DRC, it has proven difficult to flesh out the provision about gender-based violence that is contained in the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT).



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The consequences of DRC's non-accession to the ATT are dramatic, hindering international cooperation, as well as any assistance aimed at implementing the provision of the ATT related to gender-based violence. WILPF-DRC, along with other women's organisations Gram International, *Femmes des Médias pour la Justice au Congo*) led advocacy efforts, with the help of Control Arms.

These activities allowed us to make progress towards the DRC eventually acceding to the ATT. We recommend:

- The implementation and strengthening of existing commitments promoting the prohibition of any international arms transfer when there is an overriding risk of weapons or munitions being diverted to commit serious breaches to international human rights law, international humanitarian law or to compromise poverty reduction or socioeconomic development;

We would like the ATT to be considered as a “commitment by states - with grassroots impacts” to end gender-based violence resulting from the proliferation of arms.

- Setting up an inclusive process, involving multiple actors and stakeholders, including national and local governments, civil society, religious and community leaders, academics, practitioners and others, while promoting awareness about the voices of women abused through various types of weapons;
- Strengthening capacity building among women's organizations to allow them to acquire better knowledge about the ATT and their integration within the *Commission Nationale de la Lutte contre les ALPC* [National Commission Against SALW];
- Strengthening capacity building within

institutions involved in reforming the security sector so they take into account gender-based violence and gender equality perspectives;

- Assisting governments in preparing for the implementation of Article 7(4) of the Arms Trade Treaty the provision related to gender-based violence;
- That the government and international community pay close attention to the political, economic, and sociocultural impacts of gender-based violence;
- Funding research on links between various conventional arms and gender-based violence;
- Organising seminars and workshops so women's organisations may gain genuine knowledge about discussions as they take place at the United Nations and the ATT conferences of state parties (CSP);
- Pursuing communication and awareness efforts in order to welcome women's points of view in the context of discussions about the ATT and within the CSP;
- Strict and systematic enforcement of existing laws on gender-based violence.

We would like to conclude by stating that all of the components (United Nations, states, funders, civil society and religious leaders) must recognise the specific gender impacts of arms transfers. A process needs to be put in place, aimed at investing in peace rather than weapons. We must engage in multiplied actions, attuned to each country's circumstances, directed at women, social and state actors as well as partners. In addition, synergy must be created amongst actors involved in promoting gender equality, in order to achieve tangible reduction of gender-based violence generated by the proliferation of weapons.

We would like the Arms Trade Treaty to be considered as a commitment by states – with grassroots impacts that will end gender-based violence resulting from the proliferation of arms. We raise our voices to ask that governments work hand in hand with civil society and put an end to widespread human suffering triggered by irresponsible arms transfers.

1. *La violence sexuelle est devenue une menace sur la sécurité " La RD Congo, 'capitale mondiale du viol'" Le Figaro. 28 avril 2010. <http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2010/04/28/97001-20100428FILWWW00341-la-rd-congo-capitale-mondiale-du-viol.php>*
2. *Women Count, Security Council Resolution 1325, www.gnwp.org , 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014.*