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# A WORLD ON FIRE

Allison Pytlak | Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Our world is on fire—and not just from the climate crisis.

It is on fire from the gun shots, the missile strikes, the bomb blasts, and all the other destructive violence being unleashed daily across the globe. In the year since Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) states parties last met for their annual conference, fighting and violent repression has erupted or deepened in Tigray region; Myanmar; Armenia and Azerbaijan; the Sahel; Colombia; Yemen; Syria; Gaza; and Afghanistan, amongst other places.

These are not just abstract names on a map. These places all represent someone's home; someone's personal history; where their family and loved ones are. They have deep cultural or historic significance. The regularity with which armed violence and conflict erupts across the globe can almost make one numb to stories of loss, pain, and displacement. But no matter the context, the scale, or the locale, this violence is all enabled by arms, ammunition, and military equipment.

Our world is on fire.

But it need not be. Instruments like the ATT were created in order to “contribute to international and regional peace, security, and stability”; to “reduce human suffering”; and to “promote cooperation, transparency, and responsible action by states.”

This may seem oxymoronic or naïve, not least given the Treaty's acknowledgement of a state's “legitimate” right to acquire conventional arms. The end result or impact of arms transfers can never be a happy story, because weapons and related equipment are developed with the express purpose of causing death or harm, and so even “responsible” trading in them will inevitably lead to the same result. Which is why WILPF has always advocated for an *end* to the arms trade, not just doing it better or *more safely*. Recent developments in Afghanistan demonstrate the folly and fallacy of “responsible” arms trading and militarism, as the weapons and equipment provided to Afghan armed forces are being **captured and used** against

them by the same adversary they sought to defeat. Tragically, this is not a new story in Afghanistan or elsewhere: when weapons are poured into a conflict, it is a near certainty that they will remain there for decades to come, affecting the lives of future generations, damaging the environment, and undermining efforts at future peace. Violence only begets more violence.

As you read this editorial, you may be thinking: “oh this tired argument again!” or wondering “when will civil society develop a new narrative?”.

Well, we challenge readers and in particular ATT states parties to turn that question around and ask instead, “When will this narrative stop being necessary and what can I do to make that change happen?”.

The Seventh Conference of States Parties (CSP7) is the culmination of a year's worth of work, conducted mostly online, on diverse aspects of ATT implementation and universalisation. The CSP7 president, Ambassador Gberie of Sierra Leone, as well as his team and working group chairpersons, have done well at maintaining momentum, seeking input, and being broadly inclusive and transparent during an uncertain and challenging time for multilateral diplomacy.

The conference will dispense with general debate and instead move almost directly into thematic discussion about effective stockpile management and eradicating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons (SALW), which has been the priority focus of the CSP7 presidency. To that end, a **draft working paper** has been prepared which outlines how this focus (which is more traditionally connected with the UN Programme of Action on SALW) aligns with ATT implementation and objectives, as well as other frameworks and issues such as development and the gendered impact of arms. The paper includes five outputs, which are subject to agreement by states parties during CSP7.

The majority of the CSP7 agenda will allocate time to the three usual agenda items: implementation, universalisation, and transparency and reporting. Within each of those items, there will be reporting back from the chairpersons of the three corresponding working groups on these subjects, in which there are also some outputs for adoption by states parties. Among these outputs are a **draft paper outlining the elements of a process for assessing the risk of diversion** and proposed **updates** to the current, voluntary templates that states parties use for their initial and annual ATT reports. The latter has been under development for almost two years, and the proposed changes enjoy wide support, but in recent consultations at least one state party began to raise questions that could indicate challenges for their adoption at CSP7.

Another thorny issue could be discussion about **financial contributions**, which has also been an open issue for more than one meeting cycle. Unpaid dues from some states parties have prompted discussion about the Treaty's financial rules and debates on if non-payment of contributions should lead to a loss of certain "privileges" such as voting, being an office holder, or joining subsidiary bodies. Across the UN system, non-payment of dues has become problematic and, in the ATT context at least, is increasingly being framed as a compliance issue mainly by larger or better-resourced states parties.

Some of these parties are also significant weapons exporters or their allies, and it's not gone unnoticed that discussions on compliance do not seem to extend to certain of their own weapons transfers that do not align well with the obligations found in ATT articles 6 and 7.

Civil society and others that follow the ATT and work to support its universalisation and implementation in various ways have been

sounding the alarm for many years that the annual CSPs (or other Treaty mechanisms) do little to promote or assess accountability with those aspects of the Treaty that are at its core.

Rather, **side events** are often left to provide the real-world counterfactual to the narratives spun in formal meeting settings. The CSP7 side event schedule is impressive, and many events will consider some specific contexts of concern: one will look at **national legal action** in relation to arms transfers and Yemen; another at legal obligations and Palestine; a **third event** will consider the impact of irresponsible arms trading on current conflicts.

The burden of accountability should not fall to civil society or other observers; nor should channels such as national court systems or human rights review mechanisms become the only recourse for action. Action must be taken by and among states parties, whether through their own statements as a way to register concern over specific transfers, by developing review mechanisms or relevant subsidiary bodies, or through joint declarations, as has occurred in other weapons treaties. Avoiding this elephant in the room is damaging for the ATT's credibility and impact and undermines other work done to further other aspects of Treaty implementation.

"I'm convinced of the enormous benefit of the Arms Trade Treaty, we can never take its relevance for granted," **stated** the vice-president of the International Committee of the Red Cross to CSP5, in 2019. "Humanitarian imperatives must never be trumped by economic, security and diplomatic interests. It is vital that the humanitarian perspective—particularly respect for IHL—is systematically placed at the centre of decision-making, as is required by the Arms Trade Treaty."



# THE CHALLENGE OF MANAGING WEAPONS STOCKPILES INCREASES THE RISK OF LASTING CONFLICT IN CAMEROON

Armelle Ndongo | WILPF Cameroon

It is now approaching ten years since Cameroon has experienced numerous security challenges, which have greatly compromised peace and stability. The first attacks by Boko Haram terrorists date back to 2012. In 2016, demands by teachers and lawyers in the English-speaking regions turned into a war between non-state armed groups and the national defense forces, which ensnared thousands of civilians. These crises are fueled by the excessive use of arms, whose ever-increasing availability and lack of adequate enforcement remains a major concern. In this context, violence and damage of all kinds are multiplying, and the mere sight of weapons has become a trauma for people living in conflict areas.

Since 2015, WILPF Cameroon has endeavoured to have Cameroon ratify the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) (which it did in 2018) and increase the level of knowledge of other international arms control and transfer instruments. Actions have focused on popularising the instruments, sensitising local actors and parties in conflict, building the capacity of relevant stakeholders, and building alliances. This led to a [Gender Conflict Analysis](#) in Cameroon, whose [report](#) recommends, among other things, the establishment “without delay of the National Commission on Small Arms and Light Weapons as provided for in Law No. 2016/015 of December 14, 2016 on the General Regime on Arms and Ammunition.” This commission could have helped clean up arms transfers to Cameroon and the management of available stocks. The management of arms, which remains uncontrolled, increases the risks of ongoing conflicts in Cameroon.

In 2019 WILPF Cameroon was engaged by the Gender Equality Network on Small Arms Control (GENSAC) to launch informal consultations on gender and arms control to prevent violence and advance development. The initial consultations included other African countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, Central African Republic, Burundi,

and Sierra Leone. On International Women's Day 2021, 17 WILPF groups and sections in Africa were able to conduct activities promoting gender mainstreaming in SALW control and management. Read the report of activities [here](#).

In the same perspective, civil society action in Cameroon is trying to draw attention to the management of weapons stockpiles, within the framework of the “Silencing the Guns by 2030” project that the Cameroon Youths and Students Forum for Peace (CAMYOSFOP) is conducting with the support of UNODA, in support of the African Union's initiative. WILPF Cameroon, in the conduct of its activities with GENSAC, brought together CAMYOSFOP and other organisations in a meeting held on April 12, 2021, to address the issue of stockpile management, in order to be able to reduce the proliferation of weapons. It was noted that in order to effectively manage stockpiles, it is necessary to control weapons. But in Cameroon, the diversity in the provenance of weapons, the porous nature of the borders, and the lack of marking of weapons are real problems that make stockpile management difficult.

According to civil society organisations, there is an urgent need to set up national databases to enable the authorities to maintain control over stocks. Cameroon should also adopt a system that allows weapons to be systematically marked as soon as they enter the national territory; carry out a needs assessment at regular periods in order to avoid excess weapons; systematically destroy seized, obsolete or out-of-use weapons in order to avoid surpluses; and develop a tool for the physical control of stocks according to the periodicity established. Cameroon would be well advised to adopt these recommendations, especially since, under Article 16 of the ATT, Cameroon can obtain international assistance to ensure the proper management of arms stocks. As the President of the Seventh Conference of States

Parties (CSP7) rightly points out in his [working paper](#), “Stockpile management is a key mechanism to limit the potential that weapons will be diverted postdelivery. Poorly managed, insecure or unsafe stockpiles can be vulnerable to theft, looting, corruption, and illegal sale, fuelling diversion and illicit trade in SALW.”

Despite the persistence of the coronavirus pandemic, it is commendable to see the efforts of states to come together in every way possible at CSP7 to continue to consider how best to regulate international arms transfers.

It is important for states parties to understand that the coronavirus pandemic has revealed the fragility of human power to overcome situations such as this health crisis, but has demonstrated their ability to find sustainable solutions. This shows how much the will of the states can help to prevent the transfer of arms that are dangerous for human beings. Whenever a decision is made during the CSP, let the lives and safety of people be the priority.



Photo: WILPF Cameroon and GENSAAC

# WEAPONS IN COLOMBIA: THE IMPACT OF ARMS PROLIFERATION ON WOMEN'S LIVES ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Diana María Salcedo López and Verónica Recalde | WILPF Colombia

Militarisation and violence have influenced social, institutional, economic, political, and cultural realities of Colombia, in different dimensions and with changing actors. From a socio-political perspective, this multifaceted, complex, and constant history of violence has had a particular impact on the women and girls living in different regions of Colombia. Women's bodies and the violence committed against them have been utilised as tools to maintain and reproduce patriarchal and militarist systems, which are inextricably intertwined.

Historically, the concern of feminist movements and organisations about the integrity and safety of women, girls, and people with diverse gender identities arises from various forms of gender-based violence (GBV) which is facilitated by hegemonic masculinities, militarisation, and power relations. Acts of GBV have been exacerbated due to colonial and military violence, perpetuating armed violence and control through weapons as an institutionalised practice of territorial domination. Colombia, despite being a country that signed a domestic peace agreement, has not been able to achieve a sustainable process that would guarantee its people the right to life and conditions to ensure human dignity.

The circulation of arms has a disproportionate impact on women's lives, "[facilitating] gender-based violence, sexual violence, violence within families and with intimate and ex-partners, massacres, human trafficking and armed conflict". In Colombia, the illicit acquisition of arms facilitates these forms of violence, where price, access, and impunity are key factors that enable their proliferation and circulation.

The lack of regulation and the illegality of the arms trade are problems that exceed the capacities of the state. This incapacity means that cases of gender-based violence facilitated with arms are

not always prosecuted. In response to this, a 2020 Small Arms Survey [report](#) makes clear that:

"The financial value of reported small arms exports in 2017 was USD 6.5 billion. While this represents a slight decrease compared to 2016, the reported trade remains at a high level when compared with the previous 15 years."

After the signing of the Peace Agreement in 2016, the Colombian state and the parties to the agreement committed to the disarmament of illegal armed actors. Collectively, women's movements and organisations focused their attention on this process, since women and girls, because of their gender, had experienced the conflict and its impact on their bodies and lives in a distinct and profound way. WILPF Colombia monitored the implementation of the Agreement. It found that, in 2016, there were 340 cases of violence against women (homicides or femicides) with firearms and 16 with explosive devices. Since the signing of the Agreement, armed violence has not disappeared. It continues to permeate our society, with fluctuations. In some cases, acts of armed violence against women and girls are not even reported.

The threat to women's lives due to threats to their security and integrity continues to be one of the greatest concerns of WILPF's work in Colombia. Over the years and based on WILPF Colombia's work on cases of gender-based violence and violence against women, it has concluded that women will continue to be at constant risk and under threat as long as the proliferation of weapons, poor regulation and control by the state, and the lack of prevention mechanisms continue.

Given the above, WILPF Colombia considers it essential to implement the commitments on gender and gender-based violence adopted during the Fifth Conference of States Parties (CSP5) in order to continue the work of monitoring gender-

based violence facilitated by arms transfers. To this end, WILPF Colombia will continue to request gender-disaggregated data from national statistics, as proposed in point 2.2 of the gender-related recommendations from CSP5 in 2019. Likewise, WILPF Colombia will continue to present analyses and reports on the situation in the country on the gendered impacts that both legal and illegal arms transfers have on the lives of women.

The mechanism presented by the CSP5 commitments is fundamental to continue the search for accountability and the elimination of the circulation of arms in Colombia. At WILPF Colombia, we understand that armed violence cannot be addressed without first having a gender analysis that allows us to explain the disproportionate consequences that the transfer, purchase and use of arms have on women and girls.

## UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL ADOPTS RESOLUTION ON INTERNATIONAL ARMS TRANSFERS

Allison Pytlak and Jillian Rafferty | Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

In July 2021, the Human Rights Council (HRC) passed a new resolution on the impact of arms transfers on human rights—the fourth iteration in a biennial series of resolutions on the topic, traditionally cosponsored by Peru and Ecuador. It was additionally cosponsored this year by Albania, Austria, Botswana, the Bahamas, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cyprus, El Salvador, Greece, Honduras, Iceland, Ireland, Libya, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Switzerland, the State of Palestine, and Uruguay.

The resolution (A/HRC/RES/47/17) reinforces the strong message that addressing the human rights impact of the arms trade is central to the fulfilment of HRC's mandate to prevent human rights violations and abuses. However, its overall emphasis on diverted, unregulated, and illicit arms transfers breaks from the spirit of the original HRC resolution on this subject—and distracts from the many serious human rights impacts caused by legal and regulated arms transfers.

The resolution builds on its predecessors in many ways, including by acknowledging in its preamble that “the misuse of arms can perpetuate gender-based violence, and that addressing gendered root causes of violence is essential.” It also adds an operative paragraph that notes weapons can have a “severely negative impact on women's and girls' full enjoyment of all human rights, increasing the risk of sexual and gender-based violence, and of violence against women, children and youth.”

The 2019 resolution (A/HRC/RES/41/20) had requested a report from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to look at the impact of arms on women and girls, and this focus aligns more broadly with [growing interest in and support for gender-sensitive arms control and disarmament](#). Arms transfers have a well-documented and multi-faceted impact on human rights in general and on how human rights are violated in gender-based ways in particular, as WILPF has repeatedly [highlighted](#) in reports submitted to human rights bodies. UN human rights bodies, such as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, have been paying growing attention to this link, including in relation to the extraterritorial human rights obligations of exporting states.

The 2021 HRC resolution also brings a helpful focus to the impact of arms transfers on the rights of children by requesting a report on “good practices, lessons learned and challenges” faced by states in relation to the impact of arms transfers on the enjoyment of human rights by children and youth. This aligns somewhat with a pending OHCHR report that will consider firearms acquisition among youth, as requested by the 2019 resolution on firearms.

Importantly, the resolution also acknowledges the ongoing transfer of weapons to conflict-affected



regions throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the UN Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire.

Disappointing, however, is that virtually every reference to "arms transfers" is sharply qualified by a reference to the "diversion of arms and unregulated or illicit arms transfers". During the negotiations, the main sponsors of the resolution, Ecuador and Peru, had included references to the "international arms trade" in a revised version of the draft resolution. But the United Kingdom, Egypt, United States, Russia, Switzerland, Canada, Australia, the European Union, including and India opposed those changes, with some arguing that the resolution was always intended to be about diverted and/or illegal weapons. WILPF explained how this is inaccurate, as based on its record of engagement in this resolution since it was first introduced.

WILPF also argued that the resolution—as implied by its title—should address the human rights impacts of all arms transfers, a point that was strongly supported by Panama, Costa Rica, and Uruguay, while Mexico said it was flexible on whether to limit it diversion of arms and unregulated or illicit arms transfers or refer to all transfers. The sponsors eventually removed the reference to "international arms trade" as a way of ensuring adoption by consensus of the text. To focus solely on those that are diverted, unregulated, or illicit overlooks and deliberately distracts from the fact that even regulated and legal transfers can have a negative impact on human rights.

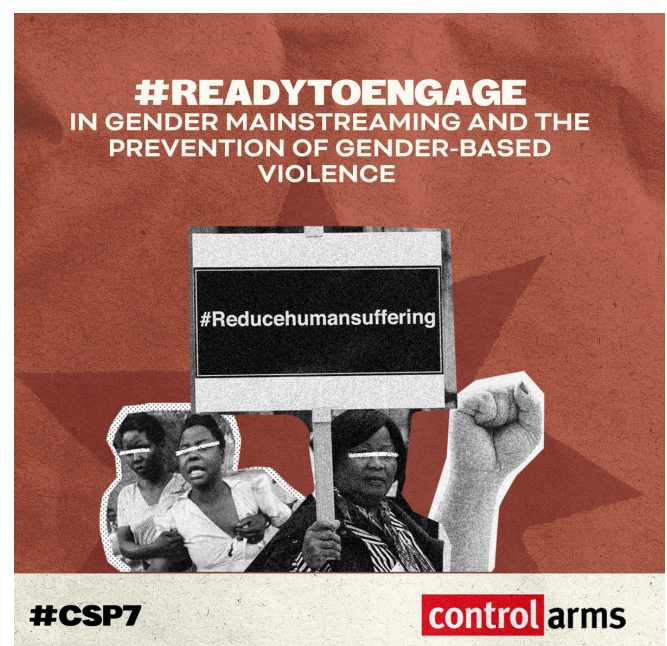
"This mirrors a growing trend within the ATT community, for example, in which an increasing amount of time and resources are being put into addressing the issue of diversion," says Allison Pytlak, WILPF disarmament programme manager. "While one goal of the ATT is to prevent diversion of arms into illicit markets, and it is a challenge facing many states, the Treaty was also intended to prevent harm from being caused by legal, regulated transfers. This is why the risk assessment process takes into account a wider spectrum of criteria than diversion alone, and why this HRC resolution has initially emphasised the human rights impacts of all arms transfers.

Continuing to single out diversion and illicit or unregulated transfers is itself a diversion of attention, and of legal responsibility to uphold human rights."

States echoed this point in their statements before the resolution's adoption. Armenia noted that it has only become possible for this resolution to be adopted by consensus after its language was changed in recent years to specify diverted and illicit transfers, describing it as "pretty convenient ... for those who produce, trade, and supply arms." Armenia also pointed out that these qualifiers were even applied to the language relating to the UNSG's call for a ceasefire.

Also ahead of adoption, India dissociated itself from preambular paragraph (PP) 14, which references the ATT. Uruguay regretted that most of the proposed references to the ATT were removed, observing that "commercial interests are prevailing over human rights concerns".

WILPF hopes that future resolutions will see a returned focus on the impact of all arms transfers on human rights—not just illicit transfers. In the meantime, WILPF calls on ATT states parties to fully implement the ATT, including its risk assessment process that governs non-illicit arms transfers, and likewise calls on all UN member states to heed the spirit of this resolution and its predecessors to ensure the full protection and enjoyment of human rights.





# ATT MONITOR

Reaching Critical Will is the disarmament programme of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), the oldest women's peace organisation in the world. Reaching Critical Will works for disarmament and the prohibition of many different weapon systems; confronting militarism and military spending; and exposing gendered aspects of the impact of weapons and disarmament processes with a feminist lens. Reaching Critical Will also monitors and analyses international disarmament processes, providing primary resources, reporting, and civil society coordination at various UN-related forums.



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