



# SMALL ARMS MONITOR

*Civil society perspectives on the meeting of governmental  
experts of the UN Programme of Action on small arms*

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Reaching Critical Will

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The *Small Arms Monitor* is produced by the Reaching Critical Will programme of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) during meetings related to the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons.

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## EDITORIAL: PRIORITIES ON SMALL ARMS, INTERNATIONAL ARMS TRADE, AND GENDER

*Gabriella Irsten | Reaching Critical Will of WILPF*

The UN Programme of Action (UNPoA) has for years been critiqued about whether or it is valuable tool to prevent, combat, and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons (SALW). The discussion at last year's Fifth Biennial Meeting of States (BMS5) highlighted some specific issues that need to be prioritised within the UNPoA framework in order for it to have a meaningful effect on preventing human suffering. Some of these priorities include international assistance and capacity-building to deal with marking, record-keeping, and tracing; excessive production and arms sales; and new initiatives and measures to address the challenges of ammunition and emerging technologies. We will be focusing on these issues in our coverage of the discussion during this meeting of government experts (MGE2).

In addition, there was increased discussion at BMS5 around gender perspectives and gender diversity in small arms issues. The BMS5 outcome document, in articles 10 and 51, includes a reference to UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security and highlights the need to ensure the participation of women in the implementation of the UNPoA.

Since its inception, Reaching Critical Will, as the disarmament programme of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) has worked to ensure gender perspectives are incorporated into disarmament and arms control issues and to promote greater gender diversity, including women's participation, in local, national, regional, and global disarmament processes.

It is against this background that Reaching Critical Will has launched a project to make ATT and UNPoA implementation more relevant and effective for women and others affected by gender-based violence (GBV).

Together with four of WILPF's national sections, our goal is to increase understanding of the relationship between proliferation of SALW, the international arms trade, and GBV. We will also explore and promote synergies between relevant instruments dealing with small arms and the international arms trade to prevent GBV.

WILPF has consistently emphasised the correlation between GBV and flows of arms, in times of peace and during conflict. The poorly- or un-controlled proliferation and trade in arms has a grave effect on the already unequal and unbalanced equality between men and women. During the course of ATT negotiations, WILPF and other civil society groups highlighted information demonstrating the impact that arms flows and the widespread use of arms has on women and others. This work resulted in states adopting in the ATT a provision recognising that civilian women and children are disproportionately affected by both armed conflict and armed violence and compelling arms exporting states to assess the risk of their arms being used to commit acts of GBV when authorizing an arms export (article 7(4)). This was also the underlying reason for including the reference to UNSC 1325 in last year's BMS5 outcome document.

However, it is also important to recognise that the proliferation of arms does not only impact women through so-called direct violence, but also by undermining civil and political rights, and economic and social rights. In the article about Cameroon and the arms trade and related human right problems (page 3), WILPF Cameroon highlights, "In particular, the proliferation of light weapons and small arms affects women's safety, and prevents them from fully enjoying their rights."

*continued on next page*

*Editorial, continued*

In order for the UNPoA to become more effective in its main objective, work on its implementation should:

- Acknowledge the varied gendered impacts of the use and spread of SALW in all its aspects and include the gendered impacts of weapons as an overarching approach in policymaking;
- Recognise the impact that the international arms trade has on national proliferation and arms use;
- Promote the ratification of the ATT and its full and effective implementation into domestic law and policy;
- Coordinate between the granting of arms permits and the maintenance of records of GBV, domestic violence, and other crimes;
- Incorporate gender perspectives into implementing programmes and policies dealing with small arms and the international arms trade within the UNPoA and ATT frameworks, as well as national and regional arms control legislation, the Firearms Protocol, and the Transnational Crime Convention;
- Utilise synergies between these instruments in order to strengthen already existing tools and to reduce gaps between these tools, including by conforming with the requirements of UNSC resolution 1325 and the wider Women Peace and Security agenda, with UNGA resolution 67/48 on women and disarmament, and with ongoing work in human rights and development;
- Promote education and awareness-raising among government employees, police, license and export authorities, schools, and communities about the use of SALW in domestic violence and to commit acts of GBV, including sexual violence.
- Invest and develop international assistance to provide assistance to states to help fight illicit flows of SALW in relation to legislation, training, coordination, and border control; and
- Increase the participation of women and other non-males at all decision-making levels on issues related to international peace and security. •



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*The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom or the Reaching Critical Will programme.*

## CAMEROON ARMS TRADE AND RELATED HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEMS

*WILPF Cameroon*

**D**isarmament is a critical issue within WILPF Cameroon's work, the aim of which is to achieve a world free of violence and armed conflict, in which human rights are protected.

For months, many families have been grieving and forced to move because of an inappropriate use of fire arms. Millions of lives have been destroyed, fundamental human rights are constantly violated. In particular, the proliferation of light weapons and small arms affects women's safety, and prevents them from fully enjoying their rights.

From September to December 2014, WILPF Cameroon carried out a study in the Eastern Region of the country on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325, as it is an important tool that will help enable women to become involved in conflict prevention and crisis management.

The study revealed among other things that 71.9% of the population has suffered physical violence perpetrated with arms. the study thus makes the following recommendations:

- Need to encourage women to break the silence by denouncing perpetrators;
- Need Cameroonian government to end impunity by punishing perpetrators of violence, taking advantage of the multitude of existing legal instruments on the issue;
- Active non-violence has to be promoted;
- Need to increase sensitization on small arms trade;
- Cameroonian government should better regulate the circulation of arms;
- Cameroon should, in accordance with the UN Programme of Action on small arms (UN-PoA), increase its work and effort in marking, record-keeping and tracing arms in order to curb the illicit trade. This especially needs to be made with an increased international cooperation to improve the marking and tracing of small arms; and
- Cameroon should ratify the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and work towards its robust implementation with a special focus on its gender-based violence (GBV) criterion.

Another result of the study was the collaboration between WILPF Cameroon and Men Engaged for Gender Promotion and Equality between Sexes - HEPROGES (based in the Eastern region where the study was

carried out) on the project Medical and psychosocial support to women, victims of GBVs in host communities and refugees sites.

WILPF Cameroon will soon launch the project of reducing and preventing GBV through popularization of the ATT and UNPoA in Cameroon. This will provide opportunities to promote gender perspectives and reduce gender-based violence (GBV), strengthen the understanding of the link between small arms and the arms trade and armed GBV.

Cameroon does have relevant instruments already, the most important of which is the national legal instrument that regulates arms trade: Decree No 73/658 of Oct 22 1973, Regulating the Import, Sale, Transfer, Possession and Carrying of Firearms and Ammunition.

This text is outdated, given the current global security context. What may be updated in this law is that it requires arms license applicants to provide legitimate reasons for owning a gun. However, if there is past domestic violence, family violence risk, or the risk that the arms be used to commit or facilitate acts of gender-based violence, the law should provide that the license of fire weapons is denied or revoked.

In Cameroon, weapons and ammunition are constantly seized. The country, bordering Nigeria, has become in recent years a hub of international trafficking of weapons of war for the Nigerian Islamist armed group Boko Haram. Weapon discoveries have multiplied recently, especially in the Far North and in the East, but also within the countries. The traffic goes on between Chad/Sudan and Nigeria via Cameroon, as there is no direct road between the two countries. Some weapons are stored in Cameroon, awaiting their use by Boko Haram or for other purposes (assault, robbery, poaching, etc.).

Cameroon signed the ATT, but has still to ratify and implement it. With current growing insecurity that led to the reception of numerous refugees from all sides, the circulation of small arms is an aggravating factor that often creates great fear among the population and poses a real security problem. Women and girls are paying a high price, both in refugee camps and within the host population. •



**SMALL ARMS,  
BIG PICTURE**  
**ARMED VIOLENCE BEYOND  
FIRST COMMITTEE**

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Reaching Critical Will

From Reaching Critical Will and Instituto Sou da Paz  
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