



# SMALL ARMS MONITOR

*Civil society perspectives on the Third Review Conference of the  
UN Programme of Action on small arms  
18-29 June 2018*



Reaching Critical Will

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## EDITORIAL: KEEPING THE UNPOA RELEVANT

Allison Pytlak | *Reaching Critical Will of WILPF*

In his recently launched disarmament agenda, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres writes of the stagnation in conventional arms control at the global level and notes that the absence of disarmament and arms control at the regional, national and local levels "has been disastrous." This observation is a good one for states to bear in mind as they convene for the Third Review Conference (RevCon) for the UN Programme of Action (UNPoA) on small arms and light weapons (SALW).

The UNPoA, agreed upon nearly 20 years ago, has in recent years been criticised as ineffective, too narrowly focused, or out of date. A review conference is, in theory, an opportunity to tackle such criticisms and ensure the continued relevance of any instrument. There are possibilities for doing so at this RevCon. While an update to the text of the instrument is likely out of the question, member states can use the conference's outcome document as a space to agree on actions and decisions, or to identify new priorities. This should not be an excuse for overlooking poor implementation of existing commitments, but rather should be used as a way to guarantee that the instrument is also meeting current realities and challenges. The draft outcome document aims to do this in a few key priority areas, which reflect discussions had

during a one-week preparatory committee meeting in March, informal consultations throughout the year, and feedback on an earlier draft outcome document.

### *Emerging technologies*

One of these areas is growing concern over modular and polymer firearms, which each pose unique and new challenges for marking practices. A working paper prepared by Austria, Belgium, and Germany for the March meeting outlines the history of governmental concern about these types of weapons, beginning in 2011, pinpoints the specific marking challenges they present, and suggests actions for member states to consider. The draft outcome document responds to these concerns by suggesting actions in Section II (Implementation Plan) under sub-sections B "marking" and F "implications for the ITI". It also calls for the negotiation of an annex to the International Tracing Instrument (ITI), between now and the next review conference, to address implications of recent developments in SALW manufacturing, technology, and design, "in particular those relating to the use of polymer in small arms and light weapons manufacture and modular weapons design." If maintained, this could be one very practical way to keep the UNPoA relevant to current realities.

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*Editorial, continued**Gender*

A shortcoming of the UNPoA as an instrument is its gender-blindness. Over the years there have been steady efforts to correct this, through including more gender-sensitive language into UNPoA conference documentation, national-level programming and policies, focused panel discussions, studies, and efforts to connect small arms with the women, peace, and security agenda. Gender was one of the priority areas identified by the conference president-designate. It has been taken up by member states throughout the preparatory process in relation to many aspects of the issue: acknowledgements around the gendered impact of weapons, women's participation in disarmament, at all levels; the necessity of sex-disaggregated data; and in support of funding for work in this area. More could be made of challenging the violent masculinities that contribute to small arms proliferation and use. Adopting an outcome document that is inclusive of these elements is a way to solidify support for gender-sensitive small arms control and improve on what is contained in the UNPoA. The current draft has many such references, and we are encouraging states to make use of the guidance provided in the civil society-led Call to Action, to which WILPF has contributed.

*Sustainable development*

It was not clear during the preparatory committee meeting how the RevCon would seek to solidify the link between the UNPoA and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably target 16.4 on reducing illicit arms flows, and Goal 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment. The draft outcome document makes several suggestions that largely reinforce the synergistic nature of the SDGs and the UNPoA, stressing in particular how reporting and data collection under the latter can be useful to the former. As experts have noted, however, the practicalities

around this are complicated. It's not likely that the RevCon will move beyond outlining a general reinforcement of the relationship between the two and activities already suggested.

*Ammunition*

All UNPoA meetings inevitably fall into disagreement over the subject of addressing ammunition. The closing moments of the March conference provided a foreshadowing of what can be expected. A really very tiny grouping of less than five countries have for years blocked any linkage of ammunition management and the UNPoA, despite appeals from the majority of countries to the contrary. These appeals are based on national experiences with both conflict and crime. Ghana and Germany published a working paper that identifies three broad areas of work through which states can "establish effective synergies" between the UNPoA and a recent UN General Assembly resolution on ammunition management in ways that are "respectful" of each country's position on the subject. None of the proposed activities are particularly radical because they seek to strike a balance between all views, but if accepted and incorporated into the outcome document would constitute the first real progress on this issue.

*Process ahead*

Of course, much can change in two weeks and the draft document will undergo further changes yet. A third version will likely be presented midway through the conference. During the March meeting, governments expressed divergent views about the goals of this RevCon, with some viewing it as an opportunity for change and others wishing to focus more on existing commitments. As well, the outcome document needs to be agreed by consensus, a rule that has caused UNPoA conferences to "fail" before (in 2006),

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*Editorial, continued*

as it has done in meetings of other disarmament and arms control fora. States that support the more progressive and forward looking elements of this document will need to defend them, and not be cowed by the dissenting views of a small minority. It must further be remembered that the agreement of an outcome document is a diplomatic exercise and has to be met with—and informed by—action at national and regional levels. There is a danger in seeing such conferences as successful if only they can manage to agree a final document. A working paper from The Netherlands proposes more regular “day to day” actions to assess implementation, such as through reviewing national reports, as a mechanism to improve accountability. Similarly,

the section of the draft outcome document that outlines follow-up to the review conference is a helpful response to concerns about the utility and format of UNPoA meetings. One notable suggestion is for the 2020 Biennial Meeting of States to focus on diversion.

In short, there are many ways to keep the UNPoA from stagnating further. But on the whole, much political support is necessary to keep it relevant. If this conference is unable to take up and agree on the solid suggestions that have been put forward, that will signal a failure not of the instrument but of political will of the states preventing progress. •

**ACTIVIST SPOTLIGHT INTERVIEW: DR. WIDAD AKREYI**

*Erica Mumford | International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) Youth Ambassador*

Throughout the Review Conference, IANSA will be contributing interviews from its activists and experts from around the world.

**1. What made you begin your work on small arms issues?**

Things that happened around me made me work on small arms issues. In my youth I began focusing on the use of excessive force by elements of the Iraqi government forces and the military, which often resulted in civilian deaths. Afterwards, while documenting the Anfal campaign and the use of chemical weapons against civilians, I realized how the use of conventional arms was an integral part of the campaign.



*Photo of Dr. Akreyi provided by IANSA*

*Interview, continued*

In fact, each phase of the operation was conducted as a combined armed assault. By the end of the campaign, I initiated a diagnosis about toxic remnants of wars and their effects on human health and the environment, in both conflict and peace. After becoming a health professional, we also identified several patterns of the association between violence against women and the availability of arms and access to guns in homes and in society. I have seen firsthand how women and children are abducted, raped, and enslaved.

The common denominator for all the above cases was the overuse and misuse of small arms and light weapons (SALW). Therefore, I worked on identifying their severe implications in terms of health, education, development and the general well-being of individuals and communities.

**2. Please tell me more about your organization, and the work that you do.**

Having been in this field for over 30 years, I wear different hats at any given point of time, depending on the organisation I have represented and their receptivity to my style. Different organizations have different leadership styles.

When I chaired the first regional conference on arms control in the Middle East/North Africa (MENA), organised by IANSA and Amnesty International in Cairo in 2006, just a handful of participants were aware of the importance of effective measures to regulate small arms and light weapons. We observed very little interest in matters concerning efforts to control the proliferation of SALW at the national, regional and sub-regional levels. Since then I have been trying to stress and facilitate civil society actors' understanding of the significant role they can play in addressing the major aspects related to the illicit and uncontrolled proliferation of small

arms. We have raised awareness of the international tools aimed at preventing and eradicating the illicit trade in SALW. The good news is that things have changed now. Civil society activists across the MENA region recognise the importance of reducing the number of small arms. They have realized how the illicitly traded SALW fuel conflicts. Their communication skills are developing to a level where they can contribute in the fight against the illegal arms trade.

**3. What are some of the biggest challenges and successes you have experienced in your civil society work?**

Some of the biggest successes I have experienced in my civil society work are the adoption of an effective and a legally-binding Arms Trade Treaty, the historic Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, and the ground-breaking UN Security Council Resolution 2117. One of the biggest challenges I have faced is the strict, one-dimensional, non-negotiable opposition to the idea of civil society engagement in issues of small arms programmes, in particular if the activist is a female human rights defender. Other challenges include intimidation and harassment against members of non-governmental organisations for their peaceful activities, the lack of adequate funds for civil society, and our inability to bring the armed conflicts to an end.

**4. What are your goals for the Third Review Conference of the UNPoA?**

To give the extra push needed for the inclusion of women in the implementation of the UNPoA and a better involvement of civil society in discussions on finding solutions to the illicit global trade in SALW. I will voice the concerns and needs of groups who would otherwise not be heard. I will be there to advocate on their behalf. •





## JOIN A #WEARORANGE AGAINST GUN VIOLENCE PHOTO OPPORTUNITY!

Aiden Rivera | International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) Youth Ambassador

During the Third Review Conference (Rev-Con) of the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons, the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) invites all government delegates, UN officials, and civil society representatives to take part in a #WearOrange group photo on Friday 22 June in Conference Room 4 after the morning session concludes (approximately 1:00 PM).

The Wear Orange campaign was launched in 2013 after Hadiya Pendleton, a 15 year-old girl, was shot and killed in Chicago just one week after performing at President Obama's second inaugural parade. The objective of the campaign is to remember those who have lost their lives or been injured through gun violence, and to call for its prevention.

Over the past five years, the campaign has grown rapidly throughout the United States, and IANSA member organisations have spread

it internationally and to the United Nations.

This year we will hold it during the Review Conference as a way for all participants to come together and pause for a moment to honour the lives of people affected by gun violence throughout the world, and to affirm our commitment to finding meaningful solutions together. If you would like to participate, please bring an orange accessory with you to the Conference. This can be an orange scarf, tie, shirt, or other article of clothing. IANSA will also provide Wear Orange stickers.

This campaign is especially meaningful to me, because I am one of many people who have experienced gun violence directly. When I was 16, I was randomly shot while sitting at a bus stop after high school football practice. I am a youth who wants to prevent this from happening to others. •



*Image courtesy of the Wear Orange campaign*