

SMALL ARMS MONITOR

Civil society perspectives on the Seventh Biennial Meeting of States to the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects
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MORE OF THE SAME, OR CAN THINGS CHANGE? PROSPECTS FOR BMS7

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

The sun was already rising on a steamy New York summer day in 2018 when the last meeting of the UN Programme of Action (UNPoA) on small arms and light weapons concluded work. Delegates blinked their way out of the UN Headquarters after a marathon, eighteen-hour final day of the UNPoA's Third Review Conference (RevCon3), which was "marked by unexpected surprises and developments and dogged by procedural confusion." Yet many felt that ultimately, the conference had produced a commendable final report.

A lot has changed over the last three years, not least in connection to the health pandemic that has swept the world, taking and disrupting lives in startling ways. Yet other things remain the same, including in the context of the UNPoA. Many of the historic dynamics and differences of positions that are linked to this instrument inevitably surfaced during the course of informal consultations and preparations for this Seventh Biennial Meeting of States (BMS7). They, plus a few new issues, have complicated and prolonged the adoption of an agenda and decisions on what format the meeting should take.

The current draft of the BMS7 outcome document, alongside various proposals made in recent months as part of its informal preparatory process, also demonstrate growth and a maturity of approach to some topics in ways that recognise the importance of ensuring the UNPoA's relevance, 20 years after its adoption. The world is changing rapidly and unpredictably, but it is still a world in which small arms and light weapons are at the centre of armed violence, conflict, and human suffering. Action is imperative.

Looking back

The BMS7 was originally scheduled to take place in 2020 and, like most other UN processes, was postponed and ultimately had to adapt to new working methods and formats. In this time, the

Chair-designate took up a new post and his successor, Ambassador Martin Kimani of Kenya, took over the role.

A series of consultations with UN member states took place in the intervening period to agree an agenda and begin drafting the final conference report. It may seem unusual to begin drafting a meeting report before the meeting occurs and any "debate" can happen, but some processes take this approach to maximise the actual meeting time available. Unfortunately, this approach forces a focus on negotiated outcomes, as will be discussed later.

Reportedly, during these consultations there was significant dispute over the substantive agenda items. The agreed version of the agenda includes four carefully worded, painfully qualified items for consideration:

- 1) The implementation of the UNPoA at all levels, and "including considerations to prevent and combat diversion and illicit transfer of small arms and light weapons";
- 2) The implementation of the International Tracing Instrument (ITI), including "an exchange of views on the implications of the developments in small arms and light weapons manufacturing, technology and design, taking into account all views and proposals of Member States, as well as relevant deliberations during previous meetings and relevant General Assembly resolutions adopted by consensus.";
- 3) Cooperation and assistance, "including the proposals on the establishment of a dedicated fellowship training programme on small arms and light weapons as well as national, regional and global target-setting, where applicable"; and
- 4) An exchange of views on BMS8.

The remainder of this editorial will try to unpack what this means, why such careful wording, and what real-world impact may (or may not) come out of this long-postponed meeting.

It is worth noting that all the informal consultations were closed to civil society, which complicates our ability to preview the meeting ahead. It's regrettable that an instrument which came about in large part because of civil society-led advocacy, and in which civil society expertise is so welcomed and utilised in national and regional implementation, often marginalises and sidelines some of its strongest proponents during international meetings.

"New" technologies

Not much is necessarily new about the technologies and "recent developments" that are being discussed in the lead up to BMS7, nor is it a new topic for the UNPoA community. As outlined in an [annex document](#) prepared for BMS7, new technologies were the focus of the [2015 Meeting of Governmental Experts](#), which built on concerns raised by some member states in 2011 about polymer and modular weapons, as well as the implications of 3D printing for arms production.

At RevCon3, a technical annex to the ITI was proposed as a mechanism to update the ITI vis-à-vis technological change, but that annex was challenged and, ultimately, dropped. So too was a proposal for a guidance document to take into account new technologies. Instead, states agreed to a series of actions in relation to new technologies (see paragraphs 52–58 of the [Final Report](#)) and requested a report from the UN Secretary-General on "recent developments in small arms and light weapons manufacturing, technology and design, particularly polymer and modular weapons," before the end of 2018. The RevCon3 report stressed the importance of resolving this issue in advance of BMS7.

That has proven extremely challenging, as reportedly even incorporating this topic into the BMS7 agenda was difficult. It may be one of the most contested subjects at BMS7.

It is a subject with multiple dimensions: how are certain new materials and techniques impacting marking and tracing activities (for good and bad)? How are some technologies making production of SALW easier? What role do some other technologies play in facilitating illicit trade, including online? Precisely which technologies are relevant, and how have those that were originally identified in 2014 evolved since then? What are the challenges, and what are the opportunities?

Views on the subject across states are likewise multi-dimensional. Some states have reportedly expressed that their biggest challenges come from addressing "traditional" SALW and they don't see this as a national concern or priority; others noted in past meetings that the focus on 3D printing, for example, was overly specific and that the conversation should be broader. Other governments feel it is crucial to account for the challenges and opportunities of technology within UNPoA and ITI implementation; their suggestions and ideas are contained in a [summary](#) of an informal consultation that Belgium facilitated on the subject in June.

The current draft outcome document includes a range of references to a range of issues that relate to technology, or "developments" mainly found in paragraphs 86–94. Some references are more specific in describing precise technologies and outlining how they relate to small arms control than how this subject has been presented in earlier UNPoA conference reports, and many contain tangible and measurable recommendations. It also notes the problem of online trade in SALW. Significantly, the draft calls for the establishment of an "open-ended technical expert group that is tasked to develop action-oriented and consensually-agreed next steps on a way forward for consideration by the Fourth Review Conference." The draft further outlines three specific tasks for the group.

Synergies

In the UNPoA context, the word "synergy" has become code for a reference to other instruments that not all member states support (and that some may even oppose) but that are relevant to the UNPoA practically and normatively. This has

traditionally been applied to the Convention against Transnational Organised Crime's Firearms Protocol (despite being named in the text of the UNPoA) and the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT).

At RevCon3, specific references to the Firearms Protocol and the ATT were excluded from the final report and replaced with the vague formulation "other relevant instruments to which a State is a Party."

The BMS7 draft outcome document uses similar language in two places. In paragraph 53 in the subsection on improving measurability, states resolve, "To identify and take advantage of complementarities in the national implementation of the Programme of Action and the International Tracing Instrument and other relevant sub-regional, regional and global instruments to which a State is a Party, including on national reporting." And in the section on international cooperation for diversion prevention, paragraph 102 makes note of "other relevant information exchange mechanisms."

It's regrettable that states that are not party to those treaties find reason to deny any reference to them, even if done in a way that clarifies those instruments are not binding on those not party to them. In many ways it is a missed opportunity to encourage a sustained, integrated, and collaborative approach toward addressing common objectives.

But, this also points to the importance of not getting overly caught up in the words on the page. The on-the-ground reality is that much of the work of operationalising the UNPoA, on one hand, and implementing the ATT and the Firearms Protocol, on the other hand, overlap in practice and involve many of the same actors. As another article in this edition outlines, this becomes especially evident when looking at the recommendations and commitments on diversion and information exchange contained in the draft outcome document, for example. Diversion has become a significant focus of work within the ATT ecosystem in recent years, through working groups, as a thematic focus for annual conferences, and in the establishment of new bodies for information exchange to prevent diversion. In fact, WILPF and others have criticised

the heavy focus on illicit transfers and diversion within those meetings, noting it is a distraction from the Treaty's intended regulation of legal transfers. In 2021, the ATT's conference of states parties (CSP7) will focus on "strengthening efforts to eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and ensure efficient stockpile management" as its theme, which is a core element of the UNPoA.

A [working paper](#) from the CSP7 president on this subject describes these connections between the instruments, stating that many of them "have already made significant progress in developing good practice in tackling the illicit trade in SALW and enhancing stockpile security, which can inform and support efforts to prevent diversion under the ATT." His working paper also puts forward a series of recommendations that aim to strengthen cooperation and information exchanges among ATT states parties to prevent the illicit tracking of SALW and their diversion—including through targeted international assistance. This is also an agenda item for BMS7 and could be a key opportunity for states to consider and address any overlap and gaps in international assistance available for the implementation of the two instruments.

Synergy has also been a way to describe how the UNPoA relates to the instruments beyond arms control, notably the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to a lesser extent, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda. At RevCon3, a surprising amount of airtime was given over to debating whether the final report should refer to synergies with the 2030 Agenda as a whole, or to just Goal 16 and its target 16.4. It's not discernible to what extent this is still an issue. There are some very explicit recommendations on how to integrate UNPoA and Agenda 2030 implementation, including around reporting. These are found within a subsection of the draft outcome document titled "Armed violence and the broader peace, security, and sustainable development nexus."

Gender

The gendered impacts of small arms violence and gender diverse participation in small arms control are topics that have come a very long way since the UNPoA's adoption in 2001. The instrument's sole



recognition of “gender” comes from a preambular reference to the negative impact on women (and “the elderly”).

Fast forward to 2021, and one quarter of total **BMS7 side events** relate to women or gender and the draft outcome document includes several specific and action-oriented recommendations for gender-responsive small arms control (see paragraphs 65–76).

The recommendations build on big gains made at RevCon3 in this area, as well as changes made after BMS6 to the UNPoA report templates to include a new section on gender. The draft BMS7 recommendations relate to gender-differentiated impact and harm, and gender-based violence as caused by small arms; as well as to information exchange; sex-disaggregated data collection (along with age and disability); harmonising national actions plans on WPS and on small arms; and for the “equal, full and effective participation of women” in all levels and aspects of small arms control.

While one or two states have apparently objected to some (or all?) of the above, it feels that “gender considerations”—however that is defined—are in fact now so mainstreamed in small arms control that it would be difficult to imagine this being seriously contested.

Moreover, the work is happening. Elsewhere in this edition is an outline of relevant work undertaken by WILPF National Sections across Africa with the Gender Equality Network on Small Arms Control (GENSAC) under the theme of #BulletProofInclusion. WILPF and GENSAC are collaborating on a side event that will lift up some of the real challenges—and opportunities—for research and advocacy in this area. WILPF has also collaborated with the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) on an **analysis** of how states have reported on gender in their national UNPoA reports. Around 60 per cent of reports submitted answered positively that they do consider gender in their UNPoA implementation, but the subsequent questions indicate that gaps remain and there is room for improvement. Some suggestions for how to do so are outlined in a separate article in this edition.

Fellowships

The draft outcome document takes forward another RevCon3 recommendation to establish a dedicated fellowship training programme on small arms and light weapons “in order to strengthen technical knowledge and expertise in areas related to the implementation of the Programme and Action and the International Tracing Instrument, particularly in developing Countries.” This is identified in the BMS7 agenda and proposed within

the draft outcome document. While this should be relatively uncontroversial, apparently this proposal has raised questions from other member states, including in light of other similar existing programmes, and budgetary implications.

Ammunition

Ammunition has arguably been the most contested topic in UNPoA meetings since its adoption in 2001 when it was excluded from the scope of the instrument. A tiny grouping of less than five countries has 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. At RevCon3, debate over including reference to ammunition was among the few topics which prolonged adoption of the final report and the duration of the final meeting. However, it did lead to a very small step forward, in that the final report acknowledges that states that apply provisions of the PoA to ammunition can exchange and apply relevant experiences, lessons learned, and best practices.

As IANSA notes in its new [briefing paper](#), “BMS7 provides an important opportunity to strengthen the PoA by directly including ammunition as part of its consideration of “the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects.” At present, paragraph 35 of the draft outcome report calls on states, “To acknowledge that States that apply provisions of the Programme of Action to small arms and light weapons ammunition can integrate applicable policies and practices into their small arms and light weapons control efforts with a view to strengthening the implementation of the Programme of Action across all sectors.” A reference also exists to the Group of Governmental Experts on surplus ammunition, which was established by the UN General Assembly.

While this one word on a page may again spark a political fight in the conference room, there are many practical ways for states to address ammunition as part of SALW control. A second [IANSA paper](#) prepared for BMS7 presents next steps and priorities to take appropriate measures to combat the illicit trade in ammunition.

Moving forward

Which brings us to a final, yet crucial point: what determines a successful UNPoA meeting, and how are we measuring its impact?

This is not by any means a new question for the small arms community; in fact, the intensely politicised international meetings (BMSs and RevCons) and their emphasis on adopting a final report at any cost has come under criticism for several years. But the dramatic RevCon3 prompted a 2018 informal [food-for-thought paper](#) from the UN Secretariat, which explored alternative approaches to meetings that would allow for a “bottom up approach,” including through the setting of voluntary implementation targets, doing away with negotiated outcome documents, and emphasising international assistance.

Some of these ideas have been taken up and reportedly discussed during informal consultations. The word on the street is that many states have not responded positively to these suggestions and want to retain the political process and negotiation of outcome documents, although others are favourable to new approaches. Many states are apparently wary of target setting, because the UNPoA is a politically binding instrument, not a legal one.

Without having been in the consultations, it is difficult for civil society to assess the current status of this agenda item as we head into the meeting. But after 20 years, it does feel like the UNPoA has reached an inflection point and the time is ripe to make some changes.

Examples abound from other fora; for instance, the Firearms Protocol has recently adopted a peer review mechanism, which is loosely modelled on those used in human rights instruments. The ATT meetings have their faults, but a lot of substantive knowledge-sharing and work has been facilitated through the establishment of working groups that meet intercessionally. An approach like this could benefit forward action on UNPoA specific issues, like new technology, and alleviate some of the weight put on the biennial and review meetings. The 2030 Agenda is also not legally binding but has elaborated and works through a set of agreed

targets. The voluntary UNPoA reports could also be utilised or reviewed more robustly than they currently are.

Yet in the search for measurability, we must look beyond the UN conference rooms and look for impact. Impact on lives, impact on livelihoods. The UNPoA was driven by a strong humanitarian imperative to reduce human suffering, poverty, armed conflict, violence, and crime.

Its title is clear in seeking to prevent, and to combat, the illicit trade in small arms but also to eradicate it.

We clearly haven't. As BMS7 opens, states need to honour the original spirit of the UNPoA but also bring fresh energy and ideas to its meaningful implementation.

Advancing Gender Responsive Small Arms Control through Advocacy and Research: Opportunities and Challenges

July 29, 9:00AM (ET)

GEN SAC
Gender Equality Network for Small Arms Control

WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR PEACE & FREEDOM

Sponsored by the German Federal Foreign Office

		
Jane Viola Felber German Federal Foreign Office	Folande Mutota Forum on Arms Trade	Daniel de Torres Small Arms Survey
		
Anne Atambo WILPF Kenya	Khider Hamad Hassan Lawyer & activist	Fairlie Chappuis Independent consultant

Join us on the sidelines of the Seventh Biennial Meeting of States on the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms (BMS7), for a discussion about recent findings on gender responsive small arms control, and highlighting the challenges that research institutes and grassroots organizations face when it comes to collecting data on the gendered impact of small arms misuse and small arms control.

THE UNPOA AND THE ATT: AREAS OF CONVERGENCE

Rachel Stohl | Stimson Center

When the United Nations adopted the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspects (UNPoA) in 2001, it aimed to address the uncontrolled (and often unregulated) proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons (SALW). The adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) 12 years later in 2013 complemented the UNPoA and growing body of conventional arms control agreements by providing a legally binding treaty to improve both the regulation and transparency of conventional weapons, including small arms and light weapons. These two agreements—along with others such as the Firearms Protocol and the UN Register of Conventional Arms—contain obligations and/or commitments that are reinforcing and cross-cutting. Thus, there are many common themes and approaches that drive efforts to implement both the UNPoA and the ATT and ultimately support efforts to reduce risk and mitigate harm in the global arms trade.

The UNPoA is a politically binding agreement that establishes a framework for action at the national, regional, and international levels to prevent the illegal trade in small arms and light weapons. The UNPoA outlines specific measures for states to undertake at these levels to address challenges posed by illegal access to small arms and light weapons, including manufacturing, international transfers, brokering, stockpile management, marking and record keeping, international tracing, and international cooperation and assistance, among others.

The ATT, by comparison, is the world's first legally binding instrument to regulate the global trade in conventional arms, including small arms and light weapons. The ATT aims to establish “the highest possible common international standards for regulating or improving the regulation of the international trade in conventional arms” by identifying measures for States to adopt to act responsibly in the global arms trade. Such measures include controls on exports,

imports, transit/transshipment, and brokering, as well as prohibitions on arms transfers under certain conditions. In this way, the ATT seeks to promote transparency and accountability in the international arms trade and build confidence in what has historically been an opaque business.

There are significant areas of complementarity between the two instruments. The ATT and UNPoA both focus on increasing transparency and responsibility in the global arms trade and preventing, combating, and mitigating the negative consequences caused by the unregulated and irresponsible trade in arms. The ATT and UNPoA are both ultimately implemented by states and focus on building national control systems, as well as reinforce existing treaties, regimes, and agreements. Both the ATT and UNPoA also rely on engagement with relevant stakeholders, such as civil society and industry, as well as interfacing with regional organisations.

Furthermore, both instruments focus on the import, export, transit/transshipment, and brokering of arms within their respective scopes. They each contain elements to assist states as they develop, establish, and maintain national systems that reinforce global norms and standards. In both the UNPoA and the ATT, the responsibilities for preventing and combatting illicit trafficking are the responsibilities of both exporters and importers. And both have a role to play in national processes in terms of sharing and exchanging information, providing appropriate documentation, and undertaking risk assessments, among other good practice.

Additionally, both the UNPoA and ATT place significant emphasis on preventing and combating diversion. Although there is far more specificity in the UNPoA (including the draft BMS7 outcome document) about the types of measures states can take to prevent and combat diversion, the overall theme is consistent: how can states work together to counter diversion risks? Both the UNPoA and the ATT recognise that states cannot prevent and

combat the illicit trade alone. They both contain elements to foster the provision of assistance to support states' efforts.

Finally, both instruments also offer practical measures for strengthening regulation of and increasing transparency in the global arms trade. For example, both the UNPoA and the ATT provide reporting mechanisms that help states understand and assess how their national control systems support implementation. And not only are there synergies in their approach to reporting, but there is also complementarity between the two instruments in the reasons for and benefits of reporting, the utilisation of information sources, the focus on record-keeping, and the approaches to reporting methodology and compilation. Thus, on a very tactical level, the information captured in the UNPoA national report may be used to complete the ATT initial report on implementation, and vice versa. And because the UNPoA report is completed on a bi-annual basis, updates to UNPoA reports can also facilitate states updating their ATT initial report as required by the treaty.

Although the UNPoA and the ATT are often considered separately, and their synergies are often underutilised, both instruments complement each other and allow states to strengthen their national control regimes. States and other stakeholders should consider and use these instruments in tandem to better secure the global arms trade and combat illicit trafficking.

For more information on comparing instruments, see:

<https://www.unodc.org/documents/firearms-protocol/ComparativeAnalysisPaper.pdf>.

<https://unidir.org/files/publications/pdfs/reporting-on-conventional-arms-trade-synthesis-handbook-en-699.pdf>.

<http://www.armstrade.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/The-ATT-Initial-Reports-Reviewing-ATT-Implementation-and-Lessons-Learned-web-1.pdf>.

COMPARING GLOBAL ARMS CONTROL INSTRUMENT REVIEW PROCESSES: LESSONS AND CHALLENGES

On the occasion of the 7th UN Biennial Meeting of States of the Programme of Action (PoA) on Small Arms and Light Weapons, this side event will provide an opportunity to take stock of the review processes of the main global arms control instruments—the PoA, the Arms Trade Treaty and the Firearm Protocol, highlighting the connections between the implementation and monitoring processes of these instruments and how they might support each other. This theme is timely as 2021 marks the 20th anniversary of the PoA and the 15th anniversary of the entry into force of the Firearms Protocol.

SIDE EVENT AT
BMS7

•
WEDNESDAY 28 JULY 2021
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CIVIL SOCIETY'S CALL TO ACTION ON GENDER AND SMALL ARMS CONTROLS

Clare da Silva | International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA)

Evidence shows that armed violence and gun crime impact people of different genders in distinct ways. As the United Nations (UN) has **noted**, “[T]he unique, deeply societal characteristics of the small arms issue necessitates a comprehensive mainstreaming of gender perspectives in to all dimensions of small arms control. When gender dimensions are not adequately dealt with in legislative and policy frameworks governing small arms control and regulation, the success and effectiveness of interventions are limited.”

The need for concerted and sustained action on gender and small arms control has never been clearer than during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has intensified violence against women particularly in, but not limited to, the domestic sphere, and is having a deeply regressive effect on gender equality.

For the Seventh Biennial Meeting of States (BMS7), IANSA updated its *Call to Action on Gender and Small Arms Control*, first published in 2018. The updated *Call to Action* sets out the priorities of civil society organisations working towards enhancing gender mainstreaming and ensuring the full and effective participation of women in arms control and peace and security initiatives.

These are the areas identified for states to address during BMS7:

1. Operationalise the gender-related outcomes of the Third Review Conference (RevCon3) on the UN Programme of Action (UNPoA) at community, national, and regional levels.

During RevCon3 states committed to “encourage mainstreaming gender considerations into small arms and light weapons policies and programmes [...]” But more needs to be done. States need to ensure a thorough analysis and inclusion of gendered approaches in all small arms control policies, programmes, and activities. States also need to adequately fund the work of civil

society organisations to ensure coordination and joint efforts from both the gender and the small arms control communities at all levels, including advocacy, education, training, implementation, and monitoring of national laws and policies.

2. Ensure women’s full and effective participation in all policymaking, planning, and implementation processes related to small arms control.

Gender imbalance in decision-making bodies influences the policy discourse on small arms. The recognition and participation of women as key stakeholders and experts in policy and programming processes related to small arms control at the international, regional, and national levels, would bring different experiences and attitudes to the table that more accurately reflect the highly gendered dynamics and effects of small arms.

3. Collect sex and age-disaggregated data on small arms and light weapons (SALW) and support research to have a better analysis of the gendered impacts of SALW.

Another major commitment at RevCon3 was for states to collect data that can better illuminate the gender-specific impacts of the illicit arms trade. This is necessary because when the gender dimension is not sufficiently identified through evidence-based information the success of interventions that address small arms violence is diminished, thereby gravely undermining the effectiveness of small arms control. The requirements to collect such data should be a legal requirement at the national level for relevant government ministries.

4. Achieve women’s full and effective participation and full involvement in all stages of peace negotiations and the security sector reform process.

As the UN [notes](#), “[M]en have long been considered \the only relevant actors in armed conflict and its resolution. However, women are also greatly affected and involved in conflict, be it as relatives, caretakers, politicians, peace activists or combatants. Including women in peace processes adds a broader range of perspectives and increases inclusivity and diversity.”

Despite [evidence](#) showing that having women at the table during peace negotiations generates greater buy-in and stronger accountability, women remain largely excluded from formal peace processes and post-conflict power structures. States need to ensure that women are part of formal peace processes and integrated fully and equally into post-conflict power structures. Women should also be consulted in processes related to national weapons collection and destruction programmes; disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration; and community violence reduction programmes.

5. Urgently take measures to address gender-based violence.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, gender-based violence (GBV) and in particular violence against women and girls has intensified, causing a “shadow pandemic”. Not only can firearms be the means of committing femicide, but they are also facilitators of other types of GBV: physical, psychological, or sexual. This is an urgent human rights crisis.

States must urgently take measures to address GBV. This includes creating well-resourced National Action Plans on SALW specifically to reduce GBV as states rebuild following the COVID-19 pandemic. States should also integrate arms control measures into responses to prevent and reduce violence against women during the COVID-19 crisis.

The *Call to Action on Gender and Small Arms Control* is online at: <https://iansa.org/call-to-action-on-gender-and-small-arms-control-april-2021/>.



Photo: GENSAC, WILPF Cameroon, and IANSA

#BULLETPROOFINCLUSION: MOBILISING FOR WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN SMALL ARMS CONTROL

Farida Nabourema and Allison Pytlak | GENSAC and WILPF

“International Women’s Day is an opportunity to think about the progress made in the implementation of cultural policies related to human rights and gender equality. It is also an opportunity to give shape to our dreams for a better future for the future generations of women and men.” – WILPF Nigeria

Every year, International Women’s Day is marked on 8 March through diverse events and activities around the world. In 2021, WILPF national sections in Africa joined together with the Gender Equality Network for Small Arms Control (GENSAC) to co-host a series of activities under the theme of “bulletproof inclusion”, to highlight the important role of women in disarmament and the importance of gender responsive small arms control as a part of IWD commemoration. In recent years, governments and other stakeholders have come into greater agreement and understanding about gender responsive strategies and approaches to small arms control and disarmament, in recognition that the impacts of small arms violence are experienced differently across genders and that women play significant roles within disarmament. At the international and normative level, this has been recognised through various resolutions, conference outcome documents, and commitments undertaken by states in small arms and light weapons (SALW)-related forums; increasingly with a view to the synergy between gender responsive small arms control and their commitments under the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 5.

At the local and national level, raising awareness and working with governments to implement global commitments in this area has been an important area of work, but challenges remain. Understanding context specific obstacles and building partnership is an integral part of the work, as exemplified by the GENSAC-WILPF collaboration.

“The effort led by women in the grassroots to reduce the proliferation of small arms remains overlooked. With the GENSAC-WILPF collaboration around International Women’s Day, we intended to spotlight women’s contribution to advancing gender responsive small arms control and promote women leadership in local, national and international small arms control policy and decision making,” explains Farida Nabourema from GENSAC.

The collaboration between GENSAC and WILPF was initiated by WILPF Burkina Faso’s Regina Ouattara who is also GENSAC’s West Africa focal point. WILPF’s national Section in Sweden facilitated the collaboration with GENSAC, in cooperation with WILPF Cameroon, who coordinates and between all WILPF national Sections and Groups in Africa. Activities were organised by WILPF Burkina Faso, WILPF Burundi, WILPF Cameroon, WILPF CAR, WILPF Chad, WILPF Ghana, WILPF Kenya, WILPF Niger, WILPF Nigeria, WILPF Senegal, WILPF Sierra Leone, WILPF South Africa, WILPF Sudan, WILPF Togo, and WILPF Zimbabwe are summarised below.

Burkina Faso

In Burkina Faso, multiple members of WILPF mobilised for the WILPF-GENSAC’s call for action. Events were held in the rural municipalities of Toussiana and Toma as well as in the capital city Ouagadougou. The activities were carried out by local WILPF branches in Louisiana and Toma, formally established in 2019. WILPF Burkina Faso created and distributed brochures to sensitise communities on the problem of small arms proliferation in Burkina Faso and its gendered impact. The campaign also included the importance of women leadership in small arms control and the active role women play in strengthening the WILPF movement in Burkina Faso. The national campaign of WILPF Burkina Faso was successful thanks to the support of its 215 members who massively mobilised for this project.

In times of rapid expansion of terrorism in the Liptako-Gourma area in Burkina Faso, the initiative aimed at raising public awareness on the proliferation of small arms, and was appreciated everywhere.

Burundi

WILPF Burundi hosted a roundtable discussion on gender mainstreaming in small arms control. The event held in Bujumbura brought together officials from the national commission on small arms and light weapons control and civil society groups working on human rights, women's rights, and small arms control. During the roundtable discussion, participants addressed the role of women in small weapons control and devised methods for implementing gender-responsive small arms control. The discussions gave an overview of the dangers associated with the proliferation of small arms and the critical nature of considering their gendered impacts on communities. In addition, the discussion provided an opportunity to gain a better understanding of stakeholders' perceptions of women's roles in small arms control.

Cameroon

The main activity in Cameroon was a workshop that focused on gender-based violence (GBV) reduction strategies, in the context of small arms proliferation. This is a particular problem in the three conflict affected regions of the country. The workshop opened with the screening of a documentary film "Forget No One", which generated intense reactions among participants and interactive discussion. Participants identified new conflict dynamics and expressed compassion for the victims in the film. This helped to spark several ideas for forward action and resolve for different relevant actors to collaborate more closely.

The recommendations include:

- Putting into place new strategies to curb GBV;
- Psychosocial support to victims of GBV;
- To put in place mechanisms for trust between the disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) centre and GBV victims;

- To ensure that policing proximity mechanisms are practical and make it easier for GBV victims to have access to police without delays or administrative bottle necks;
- To build resilience structures that would grant to grant autonomy to young people, victims and ex-violent offenders;
- Grant financial and educational autonomy to women so that it makes life easier for them to be empowered;
- Adapt teaching pedagogy to better suit the current crisis situation, as children that have been absent from the classroom for years because of violence would not be taught in the same manner like those who had been able to attend.

"It was an enriching workshop as it brought together participants and experts from diverse structures, working on ending gender-based violence and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Cameroon," noted WILPF Cameroon in its report. "The innovative mechanisms and recommendations given if implemented will help curb the spread of GBV and the proliferation of small arms in our country."

Central African Republic (CAR)

WILPF CAR and GENSAC members in CAR organised a workshop in Bangui, at the National School of Arts around the theme "Integrating gender in the control of small Arms and light weapons (SALW) in the Central African Republic". Following the opening remarks delivered by the president of WILPF CAR Bernice Ouango-Nadackalla, participants learned about causes of the proliferation of small arms and the role of women in small arms control. The speakers underlined that small arms control cannot be seen only come from men, and women must be involved at all levels of policymaking and decision-making. Representatives of the national commission of SALW control representatives applauded the initiative, and shared that they are in the process of mapping women organisations working on arms control and that they will include WILPF CAR in their database of actors.



Photo: WILPF Cote d'Ivoire

Chad

WILPF Chad held a retreat in observance of International Women's Day. This yearly retreat attempts to restore International Women's Day's original goal by concentrating on increasing awareness of ongoing inequities and mobilising women to take action to achieve gender equality. This year, the collaboration with GENSAC enabled WILPF Chad to expand the scope of this activity. The retreat offered an opportunity for Chadian women to get together and address the ills that plague Chadian society and exacerbate women's living conditions. Additionally, it educated women on the dangers of small arms proliferation and the ways in which women may contribute to small arms control. This retreat helped more Chadian women gain awareness about the consequences of small arms proliferation for their community.

Côte d'Ivoire

WILPF Côte d'Ivoire organised multiple activities as part of its collaboration with GENSAC. An online consultation with civil society actors and members of the national commission on SALW control discussed progress on small arms control in Côte d'Ivoire. The country has seen increased proliferation in small arms as a result of the civil war that broke out in 2002. The consultation was followed by a survey and series of interviews held as part of a study to increase understanding on the status of women's participation and gender equality in disarmament and small arms control efforts. After completion of the study, WILPF Côte d'Ivoire published a statement, urging the government

to take more action to mainstream gender in small arms control policies. The statement was disseminated in the press and on various digital platforms during an online campaign.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

More than two dozen development, security, and media professionals gathered in Kinshasa, the DRC's capital, to commemorate International Women's Day. The event titled "Women's leadership in disarmament and peace processes," was organised by WILPF DRC with the support of Irène Essambo, the Minister of People with Disabilities and GENSAC'S focal point in the DRC. During the conference, the participants discussed progress toward implementing UN Resolution 1325 and the difficulties associated with increasing women's participation in peace processes in the DRC. The event strengthened networking among practitioners involved in disarmament and security sectors and reaffirmed their commitment to advancing women's leadership in peace and security processes.

Ghana

WILPF Ghana hosted three online activities. The first, a "Women's Conversation" about gender equality and the participation of women in disarmament was an opportunity to hear perspectives on this topic from women, and men, already working in this field.

An online seminar on a similar theme was also organised which provided concrete examples of

women's leadership in small arms control and disarmament. The main speaker shared her own perspectives, knowledge, and experience.

The third event took the form of an online campaign for demilitarisation which included a photographic presentation about women's participation in disarmament.

"Hearing women share their experiences, knowledge, and advice is one of the best ways to get inspired to make change," noted WILPF Ghana in its report. "Online presentations, discussions, visuals and photographic presentation, posters and info graphics catalyse critical discussion for more effective strategies to connect the arms control, gender, human rights, and peace building communities at the local level and push for women leadership in small arms control decision making nationally."

Kenya

In June, a virtual event sought to explore the reality of arms in Kenya. During the event, it was shared that Kenya has about 600,000 to 700,000 guns circulating at the community level. The national government has policies in place to manage small arms such as Nairobi Protocol, the Firearms Act, and a Kenyan National Focal Point on Small Arms and Light Weapons (KNFP) who is collaborating with communities through sensitization processes and trainings to reduce gun proliferation, including through porous borders with neighbouring countries.

Small arms and especially gun proliferation has been associated with post-election violence, internal displacement, and human trafficking in Kenya. A conclusion from the event was that addressing the root causes of gun violence through poverty reduction programs, improving housing, ensuring quality education, and reducing concentrated poverty in regions will reduce gun violence and crime.

The collaboration that went into organising the event helped to bring relevant actors together, who agreed to continue their joint efforts in order to create a platform to address proliferation as well and conduct community sensitisation.

Niger

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons is a critical issue in Niger, which is considered an arms transit zone due to its geopolitical location in the Sahel region. In observance of International Women's Day, WILPF Niger collaborated with the organisation FAD Niger to host a public meeting focused on the role of women in the country's strategy to fight small weapons proliferation. The attendees were given a presentation on small arms and light weapons, their origins, and how they proliferate. The speakers acknowledged the critical role women play in the fight against small arms proliferation and emphasised the importance of increasing capacity on gender mainstreaming in small arms control for law enforcement and security agencies. Finally, they had discussion about women interested in joining the security forces.

Nigeria

GENSAC and WILPF Nigeria coordinated a dialogue on effective strategies to connect the arms control, gender, human rights, and peace building communities at the local level and how to push for women leadership in small arms control decision making nationally and globally.

In the course of the dialogue, "bulletproof inclusion" was described as involving women in leadership and decision making in small arms control, and at the heart of gender equality is the recognition that women, as well as men, have the right to participate in debates and decision-making on matters that affect their lives and well-being. The dialogue also helped to unpack technical definitions and terminologies and the WPS Agenda.

Senegal

WILPF Senegal organised a workshop to build the capacity of women's organisations to combat the proliferation of small arms. The workshop, which was held at the headquarters of the Dalifort municipality, gathered local government actors and leaders of women rights organisations and human rights groups. This activity created a great collective awareness on the danger of the circulation of small arms, as well as the damage

this generates within the community and especially on in vulnerable situations, such as women and young people. The workshop allowed participants to gain a better understanding of the women's risk of rape and violence as result of these weapons, and to make commitments for local awareness raising in relation to this insecurity.

Sierra Leone

In commemorating the Global Week of Action Against Gun Violence (31 May – 4 June) WILPF, GENSAC, and the Sierra Leone Action Network on Small Arms (SLANSA) convened a regional meeting with other women and youth-led partner organisations in Kenema district. This is in the Eastern part of Sierra Leone which over the years has experienced many violent attacks on individuals and property involving the use of SALW. WILPF Sierra Leone has sought to engage rural women more often in its work on small arms control, who have often been overlooked in protection and engagement efforts.

Overall, the meeting helped to engage and bring together relevant organisations across the Eastern region to plan for further collaboration and joint work. Human rights defenders from participating organisations were identified as focal points for further work within the three districts of the region, for example.

A well-received radio discussion considered the possibility of extending advocacy on issues of gun violence to all regions and communities through continuous radio engagement, and the idea of bringing together media and state institutions into a dialogue with civil society about women's participation and leadership in small arms control was also discussed.

South Africa

Through two events (in March, and in May) WILPF South Africa explored the issue of militarised masculinities in relation to gender and small arms control.

"South Africa is a country which despite being labelled a post conflict one is however facing

various forms of violence and unrest. This includes the extreme levels of gender-based violence and violence against women and girls whose statistics are staggering. This reflects a deep-seated culture of violence in which those who are perceived as vulnerable are often at the receiving end. Women are also marginalised in terms of leadership roles and access to economic activity, where they often lag behind their male counterparts, thus demonstrating the structural violence which also contributes to GBV that they are often exposed to."

An objective of the sessions was to learn from a diverse pool of experiences and expertise on how to transform and address conflict, including at the community level, as well as how to challenge the toxic masculinities that perpetuate violence particularly against women and girls. The sessions also identified ways to advocate for social cohesion and the inclusion and meaningful participation of women and girls at all levels, which was felt to be central to addressing broader issues of gang violence and xenophobia. There was discussion and encouragement to report on suspicious or harmful activities, noting that does sometimes bring other concerns. Many of the participants were learning about relevant frameworks like the WPS Agenda and the CEDAW Convention for the first time.

Sudan

WILPF Sudan coordinated a workshop aimed at raising the awareness of women on the gender dimensions of the proliferation of the small arms in Sudan, in particular in the conflict affected parts and Khartoum state. The workshop also included discussion of the threats posed by armed movements forces and militias in the cities and residential areas in particular Khartoum and Darfur, which stands as a threat to the civilians especially women. Participants included representatives of civil society, including women groups; journalists; and local resistance committees that include community.

As a result of the workshop, the capacity of participants—especially women—to advocate for the implementation and mainstreaming of gender in small arms policies was strengthened.

Togo

WILPF Togo held a conference on gender mainstreaming in small weapons control. Over thirty actors from civil society, several government agencies, and foreign organisations attended the event. The purpose of this conference was to advocate for the inclusion of a gendered perspective on small arms proliferation in policies and programs, as well as to allow women to engage with national actors working to combat illegal trafficking and proliferation of small arms.

At the conference, civil society groups emphasised the absence of women in small arms control decision-making bodies and highlighted the role women should play in this effort. The Ministry of Security and Civil Protection, as well as elected representatives from local governments present at the conference, acknowledged that gender ought to be addressed in small arms regulations. They expressed their commitment to pay careful attention to the advocacy efforts of WILPF Togo and its partners to increase women's participation in small arms control.

Zimbabwe

WILPF Zimbabwe raised awareness on the need for gender-responsive approaches to small arms control within mining communities. A workshop with local security officers, government stakeholders, the media and civil society organisations, the Section facilitated critical discussions for effective strategies to connect arms control, gender, human rights, and peace building.

"During the workshop the stakeholders agreed that Kwekwe and other mining cities are facing a huge problem of small arms, these include machetes, small axes, spears and a number of weapons that are home made. Young girls and women are being raped, people are being robbed, there are a number of bloody wars in and around mining communities and this violence is also making its way into the households. More important was the notion raised on security officers who take arms home from work and use them to intimidate their partners, and their partners find it hard to report the cases."

WILPF Zimbabwe reports that the workshop was a first step in building national momentum around women's leadership and representation in small arms control through localised activities,



Photo: WILPF Zimbabwe

SMALL ARMS 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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