

# Small Arms, Big Harms

## A Call to Action by Civil Society On Gender and Small Arms Control

We as civil society groups from all parts of the world, work for peace and security, mutual understanding, and sustainable development at the grass-roots level and therefore in the service of all of humanity;

We acknowledge the diverse roles women and men play in societies, including in peace and in conflict settings;

We highlight that men constitute a great majority of the owners of small arms. The vast majority of perpetrators and victims are young men;

We note that men dominate professions and activities with easy access to arms and domains of decision-making on security at the international, national, and local levels: politics, diplomacy, law enforcement, military, municipal councils, and committees of elders;

We underline that for women, small arms and intimate-partner violence are a fatal combination. Globally, over one third of murders of women are committed by a male intimate partner, often with small arms. In areas of conflict, sexual violence perpetrated by armed intimidation is an unending scourge. Moreover, in both conflict and crime settings women bear a heavy burden – psychological and economic – when male family members are injured or killed.

We acknowledge and respect the experience of interconnectedness by women across communities and borders and the solidarity they often feel even with those across conflict lines.

**We urge a thorough inclusion of gender perspectives in small arms control policies, programmes and activities in all settings and at all levels, including addressing the gendered nature of ownership and use of small arms, the differentiated effects of small arms on women and men, and the ways in which gender roles can shape small arms policies and practices.**

Considerable advances have been made in the international policy framework regarding the convergence of the small arms control agenda and the women, peace, and security agenda.<sup>1</sup> For example, the current 2012-2018 implementation plan for the Programme of Action (PoA) to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects urges Member States “to facilitate the participation and representation of women in small arms policymaking [...] and to explore means to eliminate the negative impact of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons on women.”

**We call on States, international, regional and subregional organizations, civil society, and all relevant stakeholders to strengthen the linkage of these two agendas in the Review Conference and in future PoA meetings and to operationalize the gender-related outcomes of previous meetings.**

#### **Engaging all stakeholders to advance gender perspectives in small arms control**

Small arms are the only weapons category owned mostly by civilians.

Proper regulation of these weapons requires measures and capacity-building well beyond those involved in government control over other weapons systems: for instance engaging with municipal government, police, grass-roots civil society groups, at-risk youth, and community violence reduction initiatives. Engagement must be inclusive and target all demographics, including women and girls.

Moreover, regulation of a weapon category that is mainly in public circulation will need to be based on comprehensive national data, disaggregated by sex and age.

#### **Addressing gender stereotypes**

When the gender dimension is not sufficiently identified through accurate, detailed, and evidence-based information, and consequently not adequately dealt with in legislative and policy frameworks that regulate small arms control, the success of meaningful interventions is diminished, thereby gravely undermining the effectiveness of small arms control.

A gender lens can explain the persistence of socially constructed gender stereotypes, linking small arms ownership, use, and misuse to specific expressions of masculinity related to control, power, domination and strength.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Meaningful representation and participation of women**

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., *UN Office for Disarmament Affairs Gender Mainstreaming Action Plan* (2016); *UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security* (2000); *UN Arms Trade Treaty* (2013); and meeting outcomes under the *Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects* (2001).

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g. UN Coordinating Action on Small Arms, *International Small Arms Control Standard 06.10: Women, men and the gendered nature of small arms and light weapons* (October 2017), 17.

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 political processes related to small arms control, both at the international and national levels, would lead to the adoption of perspectives and policy outcomes that more accurately reflect the highly-gendered dynamics and effects of small arms. The Women, Peace and Security framework, including its foundational resolution 1325 (2000), remains a vital mechanism for promoting equal and meaningful representation of women at all levels of engagement on peace and security issues.

## **A call to action**

Hence, we call upon States, UN agencies, international, regional and sub-regional organizations and civil society to:

- Further incorporate gender perspectives into the UN small arms process including in national reporting on the PoA and all aspects of the implementation of the instrument;
- Make use of the International Small Arms Control Standards (ISACS) on “Women, men and the gendered nature of small arms and light weapons” to gender-mainstream provisions into activities related to the implementation of the Programme of Action<sup>3</sup>;
- Challenge predominant gender stereotypes that associate masculinity with the ownership and use of small arms, which increases the risk of gender-based violence. This effort can be aided by challenging the connections between violence and masculinity and educating around gender norms as well as through peace education that promotes tolerance, forgiveness, gender equality, nonviolent conflict resolution, and alternative expressions of non-violent masculinity;
- Fund and give priority to the meaningful participation of women and girls in discussions and solutions relating to small arms control at local, national, regional, and international levels, and in formal disarmament initiatives as part of peace processes and negotiations;
- Support and fund initiatives to further build and strengthen the capacity and skills of women, to enable their meaningful participation in the UN small arms process. This includes documenting women’s experience in decision-making and political processes in relation to small arms control, and improving women’s awareness of and access to such opportunities pursuant to the provisions in UNSCR 1325;
- Allocate and mobilize funds to enhance the work of civil society organizations, in particular women’s organizations, on small arms, women’s rights, and gender

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<sup>3</sup> ISACS 06.10 Women, men and the gendered nature of small arms and light weapons: [www.smallarmsstandards.org/isacs/0610-en.pdf](http://www.smallarmsstandards.org/isacs/0610-en.pdf).

- mainstreaming, including advocacy, education, training, implementation, and monitoring of national laws and policies;
- Support measures aimed at strengthening control over civilian possession of small arms in order to reduce diversion and misuse;
  - Ensure the effective implementation of the gender-based-violence provisions of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) whereby it is illegal to transfer weapons if there is a risk that the weapons will be used to facilitate gender-based violence (article 7(4)).
  - Ensure that women are consulted in processes related to national weapons collection and destruction programmes; disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programmes, and community violence reduction programmes and that such programmes are gender-mainstreamed by including components such as survivor assistance, psychosocial support, and livelihood programmes for women and men;
  - Understand the opportunity in particular during the transition from conflict to peace for unequal gender relations to be transformed, giving women new openings for fuller participation in political, social, and cultural affairs;
  - Recognize the role women can play in encouraging men in their families, and mobilizing communities through peace movements, to give up their weapons;
  - Take into account that when communities are offered development aid incentives in return for giving up their weapons, women, if asked at all, have shown to request projects less prestigious than men, but with a more direct effect on alleviating their workload and reducing their poverty;
  - Recognize that armed groups that have recruited female fighters, sometimes by force, may not give females their own arms or may prevent them from keeping arms after peace accords are signed, resulting in many female ex-combatants and other women associated with fighting forces not being included in disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programmes;<sup>4</sup>
  - Recognize that reintegration programmes for female ex-combatants, in particular those who previously held leadership positions, should take into account their former status and role of command, rather than offer traditional reintegration programmes for women in a domesticated context;
  - Promote and produce quality, participatory research and analysis highlighting the gendered effects of armed violence and its links with poverty and other forms of social injustice; and
  - Stipulate that more detailed sex- and age-differentiated data on small arms ownership and use should be collected through relevant national bodies, such as statistical offices –

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<sup>4</sup> Farr, V., H. Myrtilinen and A. Schnabel, *Sexed Pistols: The Gendered Impacts of Small Arms and Light Weapons* (United Nations University Press 2009), 424-428.

including for use in national reporting on the Programme of Action and for use in strengthening and improving small arms control programmes and initiatives – and that gender-expert involvement is needed in examining this data.

**We call on States to help strengthen our collective efforts to address this urgent problem by consistently applying gendered approaches to small arms control.**

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