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A Call to Action by Civil Society Organisations on Gender and Small Arms Control

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Introduction

The purpose of this Call to Action is to set 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.

This Call builds on the Call to Action issued by IANSA in 2018 prior to the Third United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (RevCon3) and identifies priorities for States to address during the Seventh Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (BMS7) in July 2021.

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.

We, as civil society, working in our communities towards achieving peace and security, human rights, and sustainable development:

acknowledge that gun violence is a highly gendered phenomenon. It affects men, women, girls, boys, and people of other gender identities in different ways;

highlight that men constitute the majority of the owners and users of small arms and that the majority of perpetrators and victims of gun violence are young men;

note that men dominate professions and activities with access to arms (for example, law enforcement, the military, and sport-shooting) and domains of decision-making on security at the international, regional, national, and community levels;

underline that the presence of small arms along with stay-at-home measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic is escalating the threat and use of gun violence against women in their homes, representing a worsening human rights crisis;

are aware that in conflict and post-conflict situations, sexual violence against women and girls perpetrated by armed intimidation is an unending scourge;

acknowledge that linking gender to small arms control is ultimately about ensuring everyone's right to live securely and free from violence; and that addressing such violence effectively requires gender-responsive policies and programming;

note the enormous amount of work that still needs to be done.

We call upon all States to strengthen our collective efforts to advance peace, security and human rights through the following actions:

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

Evidence shows that armed violence and gun crime impact people of different genders in distinct ways. As the United Nations 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."¹

Advances have been made in the international policy framework regarding the connections between gender and small arms. For example, during the 2018 Third Review Conference on the UN Programme of Action (PoA), States reiterated the importance of encouraging "the full participation and representation of women, including in leadership roles and as agents of change, in policymaking, planning and implementation processes [...] relating to community safety, violence reduction, collection and destruction of small arms and light weapons and conflict prevention and resolution." States also committed to "encourage mainstreaming gender considerations into small arms and light weapons policies and programmes, including in the areas of programme design, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, taking into account, as appropriate, relevant guidelines and standards."

Operationalising the gender-related outcomes from RevCon3 includes:

- Ensuring a thorough analysis and inclusion of gendered approaches in small arms control policies, programmes and activities at community, national and regional levels, including addressing the gendered nature of the ownership and use of small arms and the differentiated effects of small arms on women and men, and implementing gender-responsive small arms policies and practices;
- Adequately funding the work of civil society organisations, in particular women's organisations and youth activists, on small arms issues, women's rights, and gender mainstreaming, 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;
- Including national officials working on gender issues in the work of national commissions on small arms;
- Ensuring coordination between national authorities responsible for the implementation of the PoA and relevant ministries or other national authorities responsible for converging agendas such as women, peace and security; gender equality and sustainable development;
- Meeting reporting commitments as agreed under the PoA, specifically by answering the questions related to gender and providing information on:

¹ <https://www.un.org/disarmament/gender-and-small-arms-control/>.

- The percentage of members of the National Commission on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) who are female;
- Details on the participation in national decision-making on SALW controls by the government ministry responsible for women's affairs;
- Details on the participation of women's organisations in programmes relating to awareness-raising, community safety, and armed violence reduction;
- Details of the disaggregated data on gender and the illicit trade in SALW (for example, the percentage and number of women participating in weapons collection/destruction programmes, gender-specific impacts of SALW; small arms ownership; homicides; domestic violence).

2. Ensure women's full and effective participation in all policymaking, planning, and implementation processes related to small arms and light weapons (SALW) 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.

In practice, the full and effective participation of women includes:

- Demonstrating the political will to undertake targeted efforts to ensure the full and effective participation of women in discussions and solutions relating to small arms control at local, national, regional, and international levels, and formal disarmament initiatives, as part of peace processes and negotiations;
- Seeing women as not just one homogeneous group and actively taking targeted efforts to ensure that women with a broad spectrum of experiences and social, economic, and cultural backgrounds can meaningfully participate in arms control and peace and security programmes;
- Investing in capacity building for women and women's organisations;
- Adequately funding initiatives to improve gender-inclusive access to small arms control and disarmament processes at local, national, regional, and international levels, by building the capacity and technical expertise of women, including marginalised or historically excluded women;
- Taking steps to ensure the full and effective participation and representation of women in all relevant government departments (Interior, Defence, Women's Affairs, Foreign Affairs), security sector institutions, national commissions on small arms and light weapons, and other bodies. These steps can include reforms in recruitment policies and practices, particularly in the security sector and seeking the active inclusion of women in negotiations, processes and decision-making related to small arms control, disarmament, peace and security;
- Ensuring that national coordinating mechanisms on small arms and light weapons control include the full and effective participation of women. States should also consider including representatives of civil society organizations, in particular women's organizations;
- Collecting data disaggregated by sex, age, and other markers, through national statistics and studies, to assist in quantifying the true extent of women's participation at different levels in arms control and disarmament activities;

- Taking targeted measures to increase the participation of other excluded or marginalised groups as well, including youth and people with other gender and sexual identities.

3. Collect sex and age-disaggregated data on SALW and support research to have a better analysis of the gendered impacts of SALW

Another major commitment at the Third Review Conference 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 accurate, detailed, and evidence-based information, and consequently not adequately addressed in legislative and policy frameworks on small arms, the success of interventions is diminished, thereby gravely undermining the effectiveness of small arms control.

Data disaggregated by sex and age can help to highlight the importance of regulating small arms to combat gender-based violence, in particular in domestic settings. However, the data will need to be disaggregated not only by sex but also by age for a more complete understanding of the harms caused by the illicit trade in and use of SALW.

In practice, collecting data and supporting research includes:

- Stipulating in national laws and policies that more detailed sex- and age-disaggregated data on small arms ownership, use, and impacts be collected by government agencies (including, for example, the ministry of health, the interior ministry, and department of justice) and that gender-responsive data collection methods are used;
- Stipulating that more detailed sex- and age-disaggregated data on women's participation at different levels in programmes and institutions related to peace and security and small arms controls be collected;
- Supporting funding mechanisms to enable research and analysis using this data to examine the gendered impacts of SALW and various gendered aspects of arms control, highlighting the gendered effects of armed violence and its links with poverty and other forms of social injustice;
- Including gender experts in examining this data;
- Being transparent in sharing this information with relevant government departments and in reporting commitments, including under the PoA.

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. This enhances the ability of peacemakers to address a broader range of stakeholders and their concerns, which has proven to lead to more sustainable peace."²

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-

² <https://dppa.un.org/en/women-peace-and-security>.

conflict power structures.³ Peace agreements with gender equality provisions only increased from 14 percent in 1995 to 22 percent in 2019.

Integrating women into all aspects of peacebuilding processes includes:

- Ensuring women are part of formal peace processes and integrated fully and equally into post-conflict power structures;
- Ensuring that women are consulted in processes related to national weapons collection and destruction programmes; disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration, and community violence reduction programmes;
- Developing gender-responsive and inclusive DDR programmes that promote gender equality, strengthen women's participation, and apply a gender analysis into all processes and stages, including survivor assistance, psychosocial support, and livelihood programmes for the communities;
- Recognise the role women can play in encouraging men in their families and communities to give up their weapons.

5. Urgently take measures to address gender-based violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) is the use and abuse of power and control over another person and is perpetrated against someone based on their gender identity, gender expression, or perceived identity. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, GBV and in particular violence against women and girls has intensified, causing a "shadow pandemic". The measures to prevent and mitigate the spread of COVID-19, such as quarantine, isolation or social distancing, and restrictions imposed on mobility, have exacerbated the violence against women and girls that occurs in homes. Not only can firearms be the means of committing femicide, but they are also facilitators of other types of GBV: physical, psychological, or sexual. The presence of firearms in the home increases the lethality of GBV. The threat of using a gun that is in the home can heighten fear, reducing a woman's willingness to leave or otherwise end the relationship. This can result in chronic abuse. This is an urgent human rights crisis.

Urgently taking measures to address GBV includes:

- Creating coherent, coordinated, and well-resourced National Action Plans on SALW specifically to reduce GBV as States rebuild in and following the COVID-19 pandemic that include linkages with armed violence reduction initiatives, SALW control measures and legislation, existing legislation on GBV, and violence against women and girls;
- Integrating arms control measures into responses to prevent and reduce violence against women during the COVID-19 crisis. This can include, for example,
 - Creating protocols for registering the presence of firearms in the home when there is a complaint, handling and undertaking a risk assessment as to whether these are being used to threaten or harm the complainant;
 - Restricting the possession or carrying of arms for security forces personnel or private security agents who have been reported for domestic violence and gender-based violence;⁴

³ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/08/policy-brief-covid-19-and-conflict>.

⁴ For a full list of recommendations, see <http://unlirec.screativa.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/UNLIREC-Preventing-VAW-through-arms-control-in-LAC-September-2020.pdf>.

- Ensuring effective licensing practices for civil ownership of firearms including mandatory background checks and automatic suspension of firearms licenses in situations involving actual or threatened violence;
- Strengthening the regulation of international arms transfers to prevent diversion and ensure that conventional arms do not contribute to human suffering;
- Regulating police, military, and private security companies' personnel possession, storage, and use to prevent the risk of these weapons being used to perpetuate GBV.



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