



PARLIAMENTARY FORUM
ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

**Parliamentary Workshop on Halting Trafficking of Arms, Drugs and People:
The Role of Parliamentarians**

Permanent Mission of Norway to the United Nations
New York

June 15, 2010
9:30am-12.30pm

REPORT

The Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons and the Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA) held a side event during the Fourth Biennial Meeting of States (BMS4) 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.

Opening

Opening Remarks were given by Ms. Shazia Rafi, Secretary General of PGA, Senator Bassey Ewa-Henshaw (Nigeria), President of PGA, Dr. Manuel de Araujo (Mozambique), Vice President of the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons as well as Mr. Odd Berner Malme, Police Advisor to the Permanent Mission of Norway.

Ms. Rafi opened the seminar by welcoming all participants and gave a brief introduction to the PGA which is a non-profit, non-partisan international network of over 1300 legislators in more than 100 elected parliaments around the globe, aims to promote peace, democracy, the rule of law, human rights, sustainable development and population issues by informing, convening, and mobilizing parliamentarians to realize these goals. The President of the organization, Senator Ewa-Henshaw, explained how in West Africa progress has been made but he also expressed his great concerns for the topic of the seminar and how inadequate control continues to pose threats.

Dr. de Araujo addressed all participants at the seminar and on behalf of the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons stating that it is a young organization of parliamentarians worldwide concerned with the un-controlled proliferation of small arms. At present, the Forum has 200 members in 60 countries and the bulk of the membership is in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe.



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The method of bringing parliamentarians from different countries and continents together to share perspectives and learning from each other is crucial when dealing with issues of peace and international security.

Parliaments have a key role in peace making, promoting and informing public debates, collaborating in policy development and implementation, monitoring and criticising government initiatives, and controlling the budget allocations of the public security sector. Parliaments are the only bodies with authority to create and reform legislation and to ratify international treaties. As democratically elected representatives, parliamentarians have unique access to the public space and as such a possibility to create debate and stimulate public opinion.

Mr. Odd Berner Malme welcomed the participants to the Norwegian mission and highlighted that the BMS is usually a very hectic week although he was not entirely optimistic but he hoped for some consensus on bringing this impossible issue forward. Small Arms and Light Weapons are really today's weapons of mass destruction and a great threat to the Millennium Development Goals. Armed violence is a global challenge.

Before joining the diplomatic corps he was as a deputy commissioner and having served as a police officer all his life meant that he had experienced the effects of SALW very closely. He had been shot at. He had also cleaned up after crime as well as seen sorrow as result of small arms proliferation. Therefore he is very committed to SALW and believes that something must and can be done. Working with SALW, he has come to the conclusion that parliamentarians are probably the most important actor given their legislative role. The impact of armed violence cannot be overstated. Gun violence kills thousands and millions lose their livelihood.

The two sessions that followed were divided up between the two organizations given their different geographical experiences.

1st Session- South-West Asia

The first session was dedicated to South-West Asia and primarily organized by PGA.

Chair for this session was Mr. Mark Pritchard, MP (United Kingdom) and PGA International Council Member. The speakers of the session were H.E. Mr. Sergio de Queiroz Duarte, UN High Representative of Disarmament Affairs UNODA, Dr. Donya Aziz, MP (Pakistan), PGA Executive Committee Member as well as Ms. Rachel Stohl, Associate Fellow/Consultant, PGA.

When trafficking is on the agenda the focus is on SALW and other areas such as drugs and natural resources are dealt with separately. However, all issues must be considered together, as a global issue and require multidimensional responses.



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Parliamentarians sometimes ask what they specifically can do to contribute to disarmament and the answer is that parliamentarians set the agenda. The push for an Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) is a fine example since parliamentarians have a key role in promoting international agreements. In their oversight role, transfer controls are another important aspect. In terms of their legislative capacity, arms brokers are a common factor in the arms trade but are not adequately dealt with in national legislation.

Dr. Aziz gave an account of the situation in her home country Pakistan where the security situation is very fragile as well as in other areas in the region. Seeing people on the street with weapons is not something out of the ordinary and the police are not considered reliable. In Pakistan many SALW circulate on the black market and many of these have been smuggled from armed personnel especially from Afghanistan into Pakistan. This trade connects with the flow of drugs which is a highly complicated issue since the Taliban are the only ones who were successful to curb the poppy production. Farmers also earn significantly more if they choose to grow poppy instead of for example wheat or tomatoes. Initiatives to grow poppy for medical use which would create employment opportunities have not raised enough interest from Western countries despite the fact that this is where many heroin addicts are found.

There is a very useful guidebook as well as a model legislation on the topic and it would be very useful if this model could be shared among legislators in the region. State machinery such as customs, police and civil armed forces need to work together otherwise they are helping the criminals. Taking a small bribe here and there and so forth will lead to that the state will lose control. Cooperation through Interpol is essential and progress is slow but positive. Substantial traffic from South America via West Africa to Asia has also been identified showing that we are dealing with an intercontinental problem.

The importance of including parliamentarians in the national delegations to international conferences was highlighted and the participants were urged to take the necessary steps to ensure this. Parliamentarians can also seek valuable information from their respective UN offices.

Regarding the role of the United Nations, unfortunately the UN can only do what the member states want to do. The UN has the ability to increase awareness and capacity on these issues. However, the request for this must come from the member state itself.

Lastly parliamentarians were encouraged to go back to their respective states to continue to press that SALW should be included as an 8th category. This would allow for more data collection on SALW. Since the Cold War there has been a tremendous leakage and the illicit arms trade is very profitable. Transfers have gone in uncontrolled directions and the arms brokers, mostly motivated by profit, get involved and the currency used is often illicit goods. These weapons have been used by terrorists and manuals have been found on how to acquire weapons as well as tips on usage etc.



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It was also highlighted that a lot of focus is on the illicit trade whereas it is vital to look at the legal trade as well since many arms are used ill-advised.

2nd Session –The Americas and Africa

The second session was dedicated to the Americas and Africa and primarily prepared by the Parliamentary Forum on SALW.

Chair of the session was Mr. Christer Winbäck, MP (Sweden), Board Member of the Parliamentary Forum on SALW. Speakers for this session included Dr. Raphael Chegeni, MP (Tanzania), also Board Member of the Parliamentary Forum on SALW, Mr. Elias A. Castillo G., MP (Panama), Member of the Parliamentary Forum on SALW and Mrs. Carmen Rosa DeLeon from the Iansa Network (International Action Network on Small Arms).

Both Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America are severely affected by armed violence which causes tremendous suffering and the expenditures, both economic and humanitarian, are immense.

Violence against women and how SALW facilitate these crimes and make it yet more lethal was highlighted as an immensely important issue. Gender-based violence is widely used as a deliberate and strategic weapon in warfare and this kind of violence occurs in many conflict settings around Africa and the rest of the world.

The illicit small arms trade forms part of a wide shadow economy in which weapons are one of many commodities, including drugs, timber, precious stones, endangered species, and human beings. It is a global problem, and although Afghanistan and Colombia are the largest drug producing economies in the world and also heavily militarized, drugs are exchanged for arms in many parts of the world.

Studies show that drug trafficking routes often overlap gun trafficking routes perfectly and the reasons behind this are that the same actors and the same connections are involved and many of them acquire arms. It was also noted that the supply and demand side is reversed given that arms production and the demand for illicit drugs are found in industrialized countries, whereas illicit drugs production and the demand for weapons are found in the South.

In terms of Latin America, the “Latin American Barometer 2008” report provides some enlightening information. One of the themes of the consultation analyses which rights and freedoms of the Latin American people are guaranteed by democracies in their countries. While religious freedoms and labour policies are at the top of the positive responses, the perception that democracy provides protection against crime appears last on the list. This is very serious. When people think that a democratic system does not guarantee an effective response to the main problem in society it surely opens the door to authoritarian temptations.



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Trafficking with firearms, drugs and humans is a problem that each time requires a greater dimension and thus is more difficult to resolve. It is important to highlight international instruments such as treaties and frameworks for collaboration as well as the model law on firearms, developed by the Parliamentary Forum on SALW in collaboration with the Swedish Fellowship of Reconciliation. The model law has proven to be a very successful tool for parliamentarians working in Latin America.

The most important spot for transfer is the border area between the USA and Mexico, which is the doorkeeper to the rest of Latin America. Another important location for transfer is the so-called “triple border” between Argentina and Paraguay and Brazil and Venezuela.

The speakers urged major arms exporter to play an important role in this matter. Without support from the suppliers and their decision to adhere to strict rules governing transfers, the process is bound to fail or to become a mere declaration of principles.

During the discussion that followed a few participants brought up the fact that there are many national and international protocols and instruments in place today and stressed the need for parliamentarians to draw attention to implementation. Parliament in respective countries should be in control of creating and supervising governmental associations on the issue. MP Winbäck (Sweden) commented that a governmental association already exists in the Swedish Parliament, which consists of engaged MPs from every party represented in the Swedish Parliament. This approach has turned out to be very successful.

Regarding the civil society perspective it was communicated that citizens considers MPs to be their representatives since they are democratically elected. Parliamentarians can create effective frameworks for controlling arms. The Parliamentary Forum on SALW, for example, was created when Swedish MPs asked their counterparts in Central America on how they could contribute to reducing the violence in the region and how to establish more strict laws on firearms. An exchange of best practices is thus very important as well as cooperation between parliamentarians and the civil society. It was noted that the moratoriums in Africa are good examples for other regions. The problem of arms trafficking should consequently be addressed both in a regional and in a multidimensional perspective.

Each minute one person dies as a result of firearms. Some regions are more affected than others and Latin America is amongst the worst affected without being at war. Since Central America is such a violent region, the issue of weapons and the issue of security are interlinked. The overall perception is that one is safer with firearms, but the reality proves the contrary.

As a conclusion it was noted that there have been reforms and important changes in Central America in recent years due to engaged parliamentarians, which shows that parliamentarians can change the reality.



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Closing session

The closing observations was held by Mr. Ross Robertson, MP (New Zealand), PGA Executive Committee Member and Mr. Peter Weiderud, Secretary General of Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons.

Mr. Robertson stated that the small arms challenge concerns us all and therefore requires global action. It is important for MPs to be involved in this area since MPs are not only charged with responsibility but also democratically elected and may thus play a leading role in this area. In his concluding remarks, Mr. Roberson stressed that although important work is being done in the small arms area, there is still a lot of work to be done.

Mr. Peter Weiderud stressed the possibility to change cultures over time and highlighted the fact that proliferation of firearms does not recognize borders; neither does the proliferation of drugs or trafficking with humans. Hence, the response to this threat needs to do the same.

In the case of arms trafficking between the USA and Mexico, approximately 700.000 firearms are crossing the border each year. The participation of trafficking with firearms from the southern US states to Mexico and then for further distribution into the region, is made by numerous people, each one carrying only a small amount. Hence, there is a need for enhanced regulations and control which could be manifested in enhanced:

- Border control; more resources to the police in order to facilitate implementation;
- Limits of number of firearms a person can buy each year;
- Restrictions of who can buy firearms.

The role of parliamentarians is thus imperative in combating trafficking of all kinds since parliamentarians have the ability, not only to form a debate on the issue, to monitor governance, to reform legislation, to initiate and ratify international treaties, but also to change the culture.

Attention was drawn to the importance of equally investigating both the demand and the supply side. In discussions about firearms the focus is on the demand side, whilst discussing the issue of trafficking with humans and drugs, the focus is on the supply side. Therefore, the trafficking of firearms, drugs and humans requires a multiply response.

In conclusion, Mr. Weiderud said that as international parliamentarian organizations we have the tools and networks to help Members of Parliaments to move the agenda forward, stressing that we can change cultures.

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