



PARLIAMENTARY FORUM
ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

Policy Statement on Reliable Data on Armed Violence

The General Assembly of the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons, meeting in the Swedish Parliament, Stockholm, 15 December, 2012

Accurate and reliable data on the scope, scale, and causes of all forms of armed violence – conflict or non-conflict related – is vital when it comes to better understanding the type of violence, shaping policy, developing programmatic responses and monitoring progress. Enhancing States' capacity and allocating resources for collecting and analyzing data is therefore a prime concern for legislators around the world both in their own respective countries and concerning development aid.

It should be recognised and remembered that statistics including data related to various forms of violence are shaped by political and economic interests. Countries experiencing high levels of small arms and light weapons related violence may be reluctant to publish reports as doing so may be perceived to reflect badly upon government initiatives and discourage foreign investment due to perceived insecurity. However, it should also be noted that gathering reliable data can also support engagement, as it makes development programs more efficient.

The quality and coverage of data collection and analysis mechanisms vary widely. In addition, collected data is often not adequately shared between the different institutions that record it. High-income countries, and several low- and middle-income countries particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, generally have sophisticated incident reporting systems. However, in most of Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia statistics are often much less comprehensive. This is due to a number of factors related to poor infrastructure, limited resources and training of staff. For instance, when under pressure medical staff will prioritize treating patients rather than tending to less acute tasks such as record keeping. Victims seeking assistance with traditional healers also rarely make it to the official statistics.

While many armed violence monitoring systems mainly focus on police data, the inclusion of other data sources is vital in order to create a complete picture. Public health data is essential especially in countries where the population has little faith in the judicial system and are unlikely to report occurrences to the authorities. However, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) only 34 countries in the world produce high-quality mortality data that include complete and reliable information on external causes of death. When hospitals only categorize injuries as 'trauma' without recording the cause, it becomes difficult for researchers to distinguish whether the injury was accidental or intentional and as such much data on armed violence is unrecorded.

Another aspect of underreporting is the relationship between citizens and national authorities. In countries with weak judicial systems, victims of violence are less willing to report crime, especially if

there are charges, official or unofficial, attached to reporting and receiving attention. In such scenarios it is even more important that crime and violence observatories also collect information from non-governmental actors such as civil society and the media.

At the same time, policy makers should also be aware that increases in reported violence may also be due to increased reporting from victims and may as such portray a positive development in terms of increased trust in the authorities.

Although there are ways of estimating levels of violence based on limited data sources or household surveys, which are often costly and only provide a snapshot in time, countries should aim to establish national facilities to systematically gather data via the police and hospitals. Doing so offers invaluable advantages – the ability to monitor trends and know specifically where the problem is worst, and where the situation is improving. The method can also be more cost effective than for instance household surveys.

The Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development is a diplomatic initiative, endorsed by over 100 states and aimed at addressing the interrelations between armed violence and development. It rests on the three pillars of advocacy, measurability and programming.

The Oslo Conference on Armed Violence - Achieving the Millennium Development Goals was held in April 2010 and builds on the commitments made in the Geneva Declaration to encourage and support states and civil society actors to achieve *measurable* reductions in armed violence – a goal which will not be obtained if reliable data is unavailable.

In addition, it is important to note that as part of the Millennium Development Goals states have committed themselves to improve monitoring of mortality and morbidity due to specific causes – such as maternal health. So improvements in public health monitoring of armed violence could be accomplished in conjunction with improved monitoring in similar areas.

Part and parcel of the task is to encourage states to publish regular national reports on armed violence which offer both a comprehensive picture of the problem and also an opportunity for the government to engage with other actors working on armed violence prevention.

Objectives

The General Assembly of the Parliamentary Forum of Small Arms and Light Weapons, meeting in the Swedish Parliament, on 15 December, 2012;

Recognizes the importance of reliable data on armed violence to better understand and interpret the scope and scale of violence in order to shape policy, develop programmatic responses and monitor progress;

Reiterates the Policy Statement on Stockpile Management of Ammunition and the identified needs for appropriate information and sharing of relevant data in this regard.

Encourages Forum members in their respective parliaments to engage actively to ensure that sufficient transparency and economic resources are available for continuous and high quality data collection, additional funding for targeted research to cover gaps where data collection is lacking in order to better

understand the nature and causes of armed violence;

Welcomes and endorses the 2006 Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development and the 2010 Oslo Commitments on Armed Violence and Development, two international diplomatic initiatives designed to support states and civil society actors to achieve measurable reductions in the global burden of armed violence in conflict and non-conflict settings by 2015 (and beyond);

Recognizes that successful data collection on armed violence should draw on various government and non-government data sources in order to create a complete picture; an issue especially important in areas where victims of violence are less likely to report occurrences due to logistical constraints or lack of faith in national authorities;

Encourages the members of the Parliamentary Forum on SALW to promote the 2006 Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development and the 2010 Oslo Commitments on Armed Violence and Development within their home parliament and governments;

Proposes that members investigate the current methods of collecting data on armed violence in their home countries and regions to determine the quality and coverage of data collection and analysis mechanisms in order to find and highlight potential areas of improvement;

Encourages signatories of the above mentioned documents as well as all other states to produce regular National Reports on armed violence in order to monitor advances in armed violence programmes, promote good practices as well as working closely with other stakeholders involved in armed violence reduction and prevention programming;

Asks the board and the secretariat to increase their effort to share relevant data on armed violence with the membership of the forum.

Mandates the Forum, its Members and the Secretariat to undertake all the necessary activities – principally capacity-building, awareness-raising and advocacy – to ensure that the Forum in a knowledgeable and decided fashion voices its support for the 2006 Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development and the 2010 Oslo Commitments on Armed Violence and Development.