



PARLIAMENTARY FORUM
ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

Policy Statement on Gender and Small Arms and Light Weapons

Board of the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons,
meeting in Kenya, May 3-4, 2007

When thinking about modern armed conflicts, it stands out that approximately 80% of all conflict victims are civilians and it is even claimed that the best way to avoid injury during war, is to be a soldier. While there are rare instances of women engaged in armed conflict as soldiers, predominant numbers of fighters are men, who suffer the majority of casualties and injuries. Yet, the enormous consequences of conflicts on women must not be overlooked.

Women are particularly vulnerable when they are left alone to fight for the survival of the family and secure resources for the household. In armed conflict, violence against women is on the rise. All over the world women and girls are raped and kept as sex-slaves. This type of gender-based violence is not just a by-product of conflict; it is rather a tool strategically used to perpetrate and exacerbate violence. Therefore gender and its link to SALW is an essential theme which needs to be addressed in global security and development discussions, including SALW related issues.

While both women and men do not suffer the same consequences of conflicts, their suffering is equally important. However, the voices of women are not given equal presence. Worldwide, men are the primary participants in peace negotiations, while women are excluded from these negotiations – their special needs and experiences not taken into account.

International laws and conventions protect women from gender-based violence but have fallen short of promoting their participation in negotiating peace. On 31 October 2000, the complex problem regarding exclusion of women in peace negotiations was finally taken into account when the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. The resolution stresses the importance of women's equal and full participation as active agents in peace and security and addresses how women and children are affected by war, the importance of women's participation in conflict resolution and recognizing the under-valued and under-utilized contributions women make in preventing conflict, peacekeeping and peace-building.

Despite the official recognition of equal, gender perspectives to peace and security, it has still been difficult for the UN and other international organisations to implement these recommendations themselves. Instead of employing more women to work within the organisation and in the field, it is often argued that cultural differences make it difficult or even impossible for women to

participate in negotiations. Nonetheless, this is exactly the problem addressed in Resolution 1325. If, at the very least, the UN cannot adhere to these recommendations how can we expect other groups to do so?

Gender and SALW

The linkages between gender and small arms are a neglected issue and there has been little discussion on the topic. However, there are many relevant questions which need to be addressed.

Firstly, armed violence is a gender issue that equally affects both men and women. The vast majority of firearms users and victims are men, both in conflict and non-conflict situations. Even though women do not make up the largest percent of the deaths and casualties, women are left alone to fight for the survival of their family and secure resources for the household. Small arms deeply affect women because women and other civilians are the primary victims of conflict.

Secondly, small arms are used to terrorize women and facilitate crimes directed specifically at women, such as rape and other forms of sexual abuse and violence. Women are forced into slavery and prostitution at the point of a gun.

Thirdly, in the post conflict stage, the negative impacts of small arms on society persist. Refugees are often afraid to return to their homes due to the large number of weapons still in the hands of the population. The abundance of small arms therefore makes the task of rebuilding society very difficult.

Lastly, cultural attitudes often equate masculinity with the possession and use of firearms, thereby glorifying the use of guns. In certain cases, women openly encourage men to fight and, in a subtle manner, support the attitudes and stereotypes promoted by the culture of arms. As mentioned earlier, while there are women who actively participate in armed conflict, it should be remembered that some are forced into this while others engage voluntarily.

Everyday men and women manage the consequences of small arms proliferation and because of this, it is vital that both men and women are allowed to take part in all aspects of a society's post-conflict reconstruction process. This works not only to empower women and promote equality, but such measures are key to achieving lasting peace. It is now an established fact that projects that do not pay more than brief attention to gender disparities, are liable to fail.

Gender mainstreaming is fundamental when it comes to tackling the problems regarding SALW. Many efforts to incorporate gender focus primarily on the context of women as victims of war and armed conflict, however gender mainstreaming is an effort to include the situations of both men and women in any planned action, including legislation, policies and programs.

Objectives

The Board of the Parliamentary Forum of Small Arms and Light Weapons, meeting in Kenya, May 3-4 2007;

Recognizes and affirms its support to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2001) and calls for its full and immediate implementation;

Demands that the international community and all stakeholders take gender mainstreaming on SALW issues seriously, so as to include the situations of both men and women in any planned action relating to SALW control or prevention of armed violence, whether the actions consist of legislation, policies and programs;

Urges, in that spirit, that the international community and other stakeholders, both on the regional and national levels, firmly display the political will, and allocate adequate resources, for addressing gender and SALW issues;

Expresses its conviction that gender-equal participation in peace negotiations should be promoted, meaning that women need to be included in the decision-making process on these issues since it is essential that the contributions women make to the prevention of armed violence and conflict, and for peacekeeping and peace-building, are recognised, valued and utilized;

Recommends that further research, supportive of the parliamentary work on the topic, be conducted, so as to explore the linkages between gender and SALW, whilst stressing that given its historical neglect, it is essential that funding and broad-based political support for such research is secured, as well as that SALW data collected and processed should be disaggregated, and gender analysed as a category, thus facilitating the advancement of more effective means to control small arms and reduce gender based armed violence;

Urges the members of the Forum and their parliamentarian colleagues to promote revisions and updates of national firearms legislations and security-related institutional policies, in order to better address the needs of women and reduce their exposure to armed violence and threats;

Encourages engagement at the civic level and highlights its commitment to promote local initiatives, solutions and practices, convinced that the involvement of local authorities and organizations in conflict zones and prioritizing local knowledge and community based solutions, are an important key to solving problems related to gender and SALW; and,

Mandates the Secretariat to undertake various activities within the program work of the Forum, in order to considerably raise the profile of the Forum on gender and SALW, amongst other through the development of practical policy tools, capacity-building, reforms of SALW-related legislation, and awareness-raising.

For the Board

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