



PARLIAMENTARY FORUM
ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

Policy Statement on Misuse of Alcohol and SALW

The General Assembly of the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons, meeting in Arusha, Tanzania, October 26, 2008

Both alcohol misuse and violence are common in societies, and there are many associations between the two. Understanding the nature of these associations, including the environmental and developmental aspects, and the ways in which they may be related, is essential in order to fight the problem of violence as well other social problems, such as domestic violence, suicide and sexual assault.

Misuse of alcohol affects coordination, memory, concentration and perception and can quickly induce changes to a person's emotions. Alcohol can lower judgment and self control and is often a factor in cases of assault, rape, murder, manslaughter and suicide.

Studies show that misuse of alcohol may encourage aggression or violence by altering the normal functioning of the brain. By impairing the processing of information, alcohol can also lead a person to misjudge social cues, thereby overreacting to a perceived threat. A person who has consumed alcohol may be quicker to start an argument or take part in one. When guns or other weapons are involved, such violence can lead to serious injury or death.

Guns, anger and misuse of alcohol are thus a dangerous combination. Two out of three murder victims are killed with guns. Most murders happen when two people get into an argument that descends into violence.

Alcohol misuse constitutes a double sided problem in the developing world. On one hand, drinking is an additional heavy burden on those already experiencing poverty. On the other hand, the problems associated with increasing consumption levels occur among a growing middle class in a number of countries.

Alcohol abuse is an obstacle to development as it has a direct economic cost. Among these costs are those associated with a loss of productivity due to alcohol-related premature death, crime and illness. According to Norwegian development organisations FORUT, alcohol has been estimated to cost between 1% and 2% of GDP (gross domestic product) in developing countries.

The welfare of individuals is also greatly affected by alcohol abuse. Drinking costs money, and very often takes priority over household needs, leaving families unable to afford basic goods and

services. It leads to a lack of motivation, loss of employment, poverty, as well as incidences of crime and the use of violence.

Another significant social problem related to alcohol misuse is that of domestic violence. Women suffer the majority of the consequences and bear the greatest risk of injury from domestic violence. Many studies indicate high rates of alcohol abuse by men who batter their female partners. Data on the link between domestic violence and alcohol abuse shows that 80% of men were under the influence of alcohol when they last committed an act of domestic violence. Domestic violence becomes even more lethal when guns are involved.

The message “don’t drink and drive” is promoted in all societies, but such practices should go further with the enforcement of laws prohibiting other activities when under the influence of alcohol. Unfortunately in many countries there is still tolerance of the violation of laws relating to carrying and/or using firearms while intoxicated. Driving while intoxicated is dangerous and drivers with high blood alcohol concentration have a greatly increased risk of causing an accident. The same risks are associated with carrying a gun while drunk.

Under United States legislation, a person that has a license to carry a handgun can still be charged with the separate crime of transporting/being in possession of a firearm while drunk. If convicted of such a crime, the license for the gun is suspended for certain period of time. If a person is convicted twice, the handgun license can be revoked. Problems have however emerged in countries where the law it is not explicit concerning this issue.

All countries must recognize the necessity of improving the management of drinking environments and, more importantly, enact measures designed to preserve and promote non-tolerance concerning the possession of firearms while intoxicated.

Preventive measures at the national and municipal level are one of the most effective ways to stabilize alcohol consumption. It is more difficult to implement measures intended to limit the availability of alcohol due to the availability of cheaper alcohol, either locally or through increased private importation. It is therefore necessary to make use of other policy instruments in order to bring about a reduction in alcohol-related violence.

Objectives

The General Assembly of the Parliamentary Forum of Small Arms and Light Weapons, meeting in Arusha, Tanzania on October 26, 2008;

Recognizes the need to explore the relationship between alcohol misconsumption, violence and aggression and the role of the State in regulating these issues in order to break the cycle of alcohol abuse and violence;

Encourages the implementation and the enforcement of national legislation to promote the safe consumption of alcohol in order to reduce the risk societies face from an increase in violence and/or lack of development;

Takes note that drinking is frequently cited as a primary cause of social problems; it is undeniable that alcohol-related problems affect all sectors of society and those problems are a threat to development, increasing the levels of poverty and reducing productivity;

Supports the members of the Forum and their Parliamentary colleagues in improving the preventive methods of municipalities in order for them to become more structured and extensive, leading in turn to a reduction in the demand for alcohol, mostly in the form of information campaigns directed at children, young people and their parents;

Urges the need for awareness-raising on the threat of alcohol consumption to the development of societies and the danger of carrying a gun while under the influence of alcohol;

Recommends the States to implement public policies, social norms and education, as well as review previous legislation in order to address the links between alcohol misuse, violence and development;

Considers the need for the States to develop prevention and treatment programmes providing clear, concise and effective policies that can reasonably be drawn from the available evidence

Mandates the Board and the Secretariat to follow the development of the issues of alcohol misuse and violence, and take action in line with the adopted policy;