



PARLIAMENTARY FORUM
ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

Policy Statement on Youth, Peace and Security

Board of the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons, meeting on the 7th of April, 2017

Today's generation of young people is the largest the world has ever known. A high concentration of youth is found in developing countries¹ and in many areas affected by armed conflict and violence the majority of the population are young people between 18-29 years.² The Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons identifies a need for young people and parliamentarians to join forces in order to prevent and reduce armed violence. The interest for addressing the role of youth and facilitation of exchange with young people has been repeatedly expressed by Parliamentary Forum members.

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) continue to be the weapon of choice in criminal and conflict violence. In violation of international law and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), SALW have a strong negative impact on young people's security, rights and physical and mental well-being worldwide. Young people are particularly affected by the presence of SALW, in conflict and post-conflict situations as well as in non-conflict settings.

Together the world's countries have pledged to work to achieve sustainable development through the implementation of Agenda 2030, where target 16 on peaceful and inclusive societies is the beacon for tackling problems relating to armed violence and conflict.

While this task requires the involvement of a variety of actors, the active participation of youth is crucial for the successful implementation of Agenda 2030 and efforts to reduce and prevent violence and conflict. Civil society as a whole had an important role in shaping the goals of the agenda, but studies show³ that youth organisations have not been given the space needed to influence the agenda.

¹ Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth '10 things you didn't know about the world's population' (2017)

<http://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2015/04/10-things-didnt-know-worlds-population/>

² United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security (2015)

<http://unoy.org/wp-content/uploads/SCR-2250.pdf>

³ National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations, LSU 'Ungas engagemang för en hållbar värld' (2016)

http://lsu.se/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/ungas_engagemang_for_en_hallbar_varld-agenda2030-rapport_webb.pdf

The conditions for continued participation is limited rather than supported, which is remarkable, given that the agenda is their future. This means that young people's rights are being neglected while at the same time the world is missing out on invaluable contributions to achieving the goals.

In this light, the Parliamentary Forum welcomes the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security,⁴ which provides vital guidance to address this issue, in the field of armed violence and prevention. The resolution, adopted in 2015, identifies five key pillars for action: participation, protection, prevention, partnerships, disengagement and reintegration. It is the first of its kind to formally recognize the positive role and the rights of young people in creating sustainable peace and paves the way for how governments and other actors can support young people in this role.

Traditionally young people have been seen as either victims or perpetrators of violence. There is a tendency to see the 'youth bulge' as a threat to security and stability. Especially young men are regarded as a problem, potentially dangerous and the main perpetrators of criminal and political violence, including radicalization to violence and violent extremism. Unemployment and lack of opportunities are important contributing factors leading to violence which must continue to be addressed in policies and programmes across the world. SALW are not the source of armed violence or conflict but are violence and conflict multipliers. As stated in the UN Secretary General's latest report to the Security Council on the issue, "the widespread availability of SALW and their ammunition is a key enabler of conflict".⁵

However, youth who participate actively in violence are a minority. Despite living in difficult contexts, the majority of youth do not participate in violence. Both groups instead constitute valuable resources in preventing and reducing armed violence. In addition, several countries with a high youth population are relatively stable.⁶ Backed by substantial research⁷, UNSCR 2250 thus represents a milestone in that it offers a third approach in which young people are seen as peace-builders whose efforts should be recognized and supported.⁸

It is also vital to continuously apply a gender sensitive approach and include the experiences of men and women, boys and girls in all discussions related to peace and security. Violence is often linked to norms on masculinity. Boys and men are those who commit violent acts to the greatest extent and also the main direct victims. While boys and men account for the majority of casualties of lethal armed violence, 84%,⁹ it also has devastating consequences for women and girls who are at

⁴ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security (2015)

<http://unoy.org/wp-content/uploads/SCR-2250.pdf>

⁵ Secretary-General's report 2015 to the Security Council,

http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2015/289

⁶ Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development Working Group on Youth and Peacebuilding with support from PeaceNexus Foundation 'Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding: A Practice Note'

<http://www.un.org/en/peacebuilding/pbso/pdf/Practice%20Note%20Youth%20&%20Peacebuilding%20-%20January%202016.pdf>

⁷ Ibid

⁸ The United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY Peacebuilders) UNOY Blog December 9th, 2015

<http://unoy.org/uns-c-adopts-resolution-on-youth-peace-and-security/>

⁹ Small Arms Survey 'A Gendered Analysis of Violent Deaths' 2016

http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/H-Research_Notes/SAS-Research-Note-63.pdf

heightened risk of various forms of violence, including gender-based violence which is not just a by-product of conflict; but rather a tool strategically used in warfare which was formally recognised in UNSCR 1820.¹⁰ The spread of SALW also leads to increased violence against women. Studies¹¹ show that there is a direct correlation between femicide rates and the use of firearm where globally, firearms were used in a third of all femicides. Promoting arms control is therefore to promote women's security. In addition, young women are increasingly involved in violence and extremist groups.¹² Research show that women make up 10-30% of armed forces and groups¹³ and many join in order to obtain more rights and gender equality. As civilians, women contribute to instigating violence by encouraging men or by passing on hatred of the enemy to children.¹⁴

Linking Agenda 2030 and UNSCR 2250 in order to strengthen youth as active peace-builders is therefore an important basis to prevent and reduce armed violence. An environment of armed violence or threats of violence can in itself constitute a barrier to young people's opportunities to actively contribute to peace and security. The two instruments provide unique opportunities to identify steps ahead as to strengthen the role of youth as peace-builders.

Young people's rights and participation is strengthened when included in contexts where they perceive they are taken seriously and listened to by those in power, but there is a tendency to engage primarily with well-established, educated youth. Grassroots organisations active in the field of youth and violence testify that there is a gap between civil society and public institutions. A lack of faith in politicians and democratic processes amongst young people can lead individuals to resort to violence and undemocratic behaviour. A major challenge and key to success is to identify new, innovative ways to include non-organised, vulnerable groups and young people at risk in discussions in order to build trust and ensure a mutually beneficial dialogue. Youth organisations and their members have a crucial role in guiding this work and advising on suitable formats for dialogue that captures the needs and interests of youth.

Dialogue must take place with a variety of actors, in order to include the experiences and knowledge of youth in different fields. Parliamentarians are particularly important for building sustainable peace and providing a platform for different interests to express views – including those of youth. In the national context parliamentarians have three key roles; the legislative, over-sight and awareness-raising functions, as well as through international cooperation and exchange in order to implement

¹⁰ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1820 (2008)
<http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/CAC%20S%20RES%201820.pdf>

¹¹ Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) “*Women Weapons and War – A gendered critique of international instruments*” (2015)
<http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Publications/women-weapons-war.pdf>

¹² Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development Working Group on Youth and Peacebuilding with support from PeaceNexus Foundation ‘*Young People’s Participation in Peacebuilding: A Practice Note*’
<http://www.un.org/en/peacebuilding/pbso/pdf/Practice%20Note%20Youth%20&%20Peacebuilding%20-%20January%202016.pdf>

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ World Bank ‘*Gender, Conflict and Development*’ (2005)
<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTCPR/Resources/30494GenderConflictandDevelopment.pdf>

and maximize synergies. Specifically for this context, their role relates to processes e.g. action plans linked to the prevention of armed violence, Agenda 2030 and Resolution 2250.

In line with the resolution, stakeholders such as the Parliamentary Forum can contribute by creating enabling environments where young people from different backgrounds take part in efforts to prevent and reduce violence as well as to address the issue as such. The Parliamentary Forum together with other parliamentary bodies and their members can serve as the missing link between public institutions and youth, including youth organisations, individuals at risk and youth in general – where parliamentarians constitute the connecting agent between civil society and public institutions – strengthening the social contract.

Objectives

The Board of the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons, meeting on the 7th of April, 2017;

Recognizes the important and positive contribution of youth in efforts to maintain and promote peace and security, avoiding the conceptual trap that youth are either victims or perpetrators of violence and *understands* that effective institutional arrangements to ensure youth participation in peace-building processes significantly contribute to international peace and security;

Welcomes and supports the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security (2015), and *calls* for its full and immediate implementation;

Promotes young people's participation in processes on peace and security at national, regional and international levels and *calls for* the establishment of structures in decision-making processes at all levels to bring in young people's skills and perspectives on issues related to peace and security;

Recognizes that while men and boys are the main perpetrators and direct victims, armed violence has consequences for girls and women both as victims, including gender-based violence, as well as through active participation in violent activity, as fighters or civilians and *reinstates* the importance of including the experiences of women and men in any planned action, including legislation, policies and programs related to peace and security;

Draws attention to the fact that the situation of youth is clearly linked to the proliferation of SALW which has a strong negative impact on young people's security, rights and physical and mental well-being and must be addressed in global security and development discussions;

Encourages on-going dialogue between civil society and public institutions on issues related to youth, peace and security and *recognises* the importance of building trust and identifying new innovative ways to include vulnerable groups;

Acknowledges the important role of youth organisations in addressing issues related to armed violence and their potential in prevention actions and response for supporting vulnerable youth; and

encourages parliamentarians to create partnerships with youth organisations to increase the impact of parliamentary action;

Recognizes that unemployment and lack of opportunities are important contributing factors that lead youth to resort to criminal or political violence and *stresses* the need for continued investments in both public and private initiatives and partnerships;

Stresses the importance of investing in youth and peace building in government programmes as well as through civil society initiatives and *promotes* youth-led initiatives that go beyond well-established and educated youth;

Calls on parliamentarians to review and scrutinise government policies, party programmes, appropriation bills and budgets action plans related to Agenda 2030, UNSCR 2250 and other relevant processes related to youth, peace and security;

Encourages South-South parliamentary cooperation in order to exchange ideas and share experiences of successful youth violence prevention efforts and youth peace-building programmes in different regions;

Emphasizes the important role of states, parliamentarians, United Nations and other relevant actors in establishing mechanisms to monitor and report on youth, peace and security as well as fund and independently evaluate work and research initiatives to investigate the impact of youth peace building programmes;

Mandates the Parliamentary Forum, its Members and the Secretariat to undertake all necessary efforts towards effective implementation of UNSCR 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security.