



Report of the
Parliamentary Event for Members of the Liberian Legislature

Held in the First Floor Conference Room of the House of Representatives

Organized by:

Action on Armed Violence (AOAV)
Liberia Armed Violence Observatory (LAVO)
Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons

Wednesday, May 29, 2013

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List of Abbreviation/acronym

LiNCSA-----	the Liberia National Commission on Small Arms
LAVO-----	Liberia Armed Violence Observatory
AOAV-----	Action on Armed Violence
WANEP-----	West African Network for Peacebuilding
MRU-----	Mano River Union
SALW-----	Small Arms and Light Weapons
NGOs-----	Non Governmental organizations
UNREC -----	United Nation Regional Center for Peace and Disarmament in Africa
UNMIL-----	United Nation Mission in Liberia
ECOWAS-----	Economic Community of West African States
UNPOL-----	United Nation Police of Liberia
LNP-----	Liberia National Police

Acknowledgement

Action on Armed Violence (AOAV), Liberia Armed Violence Observatory (LAVO) and the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons highly appreciate the participation of the Liberia National Legislature, civil society and media organizations for being a part of the program. The organizers greatly recognized the key points unearthed by the participants during the program which helped make this report. A special heartfelt thanks and appreciation go to Honorable Representative Gabriel B. Smith for his support in organizing the program and Forum.

Executive summary

A workshop has been held at the Liberian Parliament on 29th of May 2013 organized by British NGO Action on Armed Violence (AOAV), the Liberia Armed Violence Observatory (LAVO) and the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons.

The event was hosted by Forum member Honorable Representative Gabriel B. Smith and brought together 11 legislators including the Chairman of the Defense Committee in the lower house and a senator and member of the defense committee in the upper house, an assistant minister for internal affairs, representatives from the Ministry of Defense and Justice Ministry, the Liberia National Commission on Small Arms (LiNCSA) as well as representatives from the Liberian Red Cross and the civil society organization of West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP).

The three hour forum generated good discussions on how legislators can work on SALW related issues in their home parliament and actively engage with civil society partners – organizations which work closely with the communities and have the knowledge of the underlying causes of conflict and good ideas on how to prevent violence. Legislators have the power and mandate to formulate policy and create legislative measures but need the input from civil society on what the situation is like on the ground. At the same time civil society need the help of their elected representatives to show them the way to translate their knowledge and ideas into effective measures to address armed violence in Liberia.

AOAV and LAVO have agreed to make follow up with the Legislators in order to include them in the work of LAVO to analyze the armed violence situation and generate programmatic responses to the issues identified. The findings of LAVO were pointed out as: Monrovia is identified to be the place where most violence or incidents occurred. Majority of the victims and offenders are male who in their youthful age between the ages 18-35. Armed robberies and assault are the highest crime committed and the weapons that are used are bladed and blunt weapons. Liberians are the highest offenders and victims of violence. The highest data provided are LNP followed by UNPOL. LAVO collects data from LNP, UNPOL, civil society, hospitals and other organizations that deal with armed violence data.

Introduction

Armed violence continues to pose a serious threat to Liberia and the world at large. It affects developed countries and underdeveloped countries. It undermines the poverty reduction strategy and the Millennium Development Goals in Liberia. According to the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, armed violence is defined as the intentional use of illegitimate force (threatened or actual) use of arms or explosives against an individual, group, communities and the state that undermines people centered-security and/or sustainable development. Armed violence can be reduced and prevented by dealing with the root causes and those factors that lead people to violence. Capturing the significance of armed violence, a parliamentary event for members of the Liberian National Legislature was organized by Action on Armed Violence (AOAV), Liberia Armed Violence Observatory (LAVO) and the Parliamentary Forum on Small arms and Light Weapons to brainstorm and come up with strategy so as to prevent and reduce the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in Liberia. Henceforth, the role of parliamentarians in dealing with SALW was a benchmark for the program.

Opening session

Honorable Gabriel B. Smith, Representative of Grand Bassa County, welcomed all participants to the Liberian Legislature, stating that the speed of small arms and light weapons (SALW) continues to pose a great threat in Liberia and in the world.

The floor was then given to the Co-Chairman of the Liberia Armed Violence Observatory (LAVO), Mr. Philip Kollie from West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) who began by explaining that the Chairman of LAVO, Assistant Minister of Internal Affairs, Hon. E. Ekema Witherspoon, had to leave and hand over to him due to the late start of the session. Mr. Kollie said that there is a strong need to organize this kind of activities where parliamentarians can interact with representatives of government as well as civil society who come to share information on the dangers of SALW. Although the civil war is over in Liberia, the country still suffers from insecurity and armed violence. While it may not be possible to eradicate armed violence, we must work towards reducing it. He hoped that the seminar would contribute to raising awareness on the issue as well as coming up with working plans that can be used tomorrow.

The floor was then given to Ms. Chris Lang, MRU¹ Regional Manager of Action on Armed Violence (AOAV). Ms. Lang began by stating that AOAV is pleased and very proud to be a strategic partner to the Liberia Armed Violence Observatory (LAVO) as both a donor and member of the working group and pledged to continue this partnership as long as AOAV is in Liberia and until we all work to realize a significant reduction and the prevention of armed violence in Liberia.

¹ Mano River Union is an international association established in 1973 between Liberia and Sierra Leone later joined by Guinea in 1980.

AOAV sees this event with the Liberian Legislature as a noteworthy first step in bringing the issue of armed violence to the attention of the first branch of the Liberian Government and hoped that Liberian legislators would take interest in the work that AOAV and LAVO are collectively undertaking through a network of government ministries and agencies, civil society, international NGOs and donor organizations to address the problem of armed violence. The active participation of the present legislators was an assurance that they can count on their support in the future.

She highlighted that armed violence is a global burden that affects people from all walks of life rich and poor, male and female, young and old, and unless it is properly addressed, it can have grave negative impacts on development at every level.

The recent report published by the Global Burden on Armed Violence reveals that an estimated 526,000 people die violently every year.

- **55,000 lose their lives as a result of conflict or terrorism**
- **396,000 people – are victims of intentional homicide (murder) Including 66,000 women**
- **54,000 people die as of result of so-called “unintentional homicide” or manslaughters**
- **21,000 violent deaths occur during law enforcement**

Concerted and collaborative action is required by governments, donors and civil society to prevent and reduce the incidence of armed violence by (1) creating awareness on the negative impact of armed violence, (2) gathering, monitoring, analyzing and reporting empirical data on armed violence and (3) designing and implementing programs that address causes and effects of armed violence.

It is for this cause that AOAV's intervention in Liberia has been focused on addressing both the risk factors of armed violence and conducting research including a baseline survey in 2010 and the establishment of the Liberia Armed Violence Observatory (LAVO).

The collective vision is for LAVO to be owned and operated by Liberians, because no matter how long we provide support to LAVO, two realities are glaring (1) the problem we are trying to solve is a Liberian problem (though it is peculiar to Liberia) and only Liberian ownership can assure long term sustainability (2) AOAV is not here to stay forever, and as is always the case, donors' priority changes over time and circumstances.

In addition, the establishment of LAVO is not the only project AOAV is running in Liberia. Since 2007 to present, AOAV has been involved in the training of many youths in basic agricultural skills in Panama in Sinoe County, Klay in Bomi County, Ganta in Nimba County, Bensonville in Montserrado County and Tumutu in Bong County.

She finished by hoping for legislators to lend support to LAVO in order for it to be viable and provide empirical armed violence data that will help inform some of those important policy decisions makers in the future.

Parliamentary Forum on SALW representative Mrs. Teresa Dybeck gave an overview of the Forum and the role of parliamentarians in controlling and reducing the use of small arms.

Small arms related violence is a multidimensional issue whose prevention and reduction requires complex and comprehensive measures from control of civilian acquisition and possession to addressing the demand as well as the supply of SALW at national, regional and international levels.

The Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons is the only permanent global network of parliamentarians related to the specific matters of arms control and armed violence prevention. Work started 15 years ago as an initiative between European and Latin American parliamentarians and the Forum was officially founded in the Spanish Congress in 2002. Since then, the network has expanded and today joins 200 parliamentarians from 70 countries in Africa, North and South America, Europe and the Middle East.

The organization is led and run by parliamentarians and aims to shape policy, influence public opinion and support parliamentarians in their small arms related work. It also provides a space for parliamentarians to meet and join forces with other stakeholders and actors. The workshop at the Liberian Legislature is a good example of such a gathering with legislators, government representatives and civil society all present around the same table to discuss the situation in Liberia and what can be done to prevent violence and the spread and use of firearms. The activities of the Forum include a wide range of capacity-building seminars and regional exchanges as well as providing tailor-made support to individual lawmakers.

She noted that this was the third time the Forum visited Liberia. The first time was in 2008 and since then the Forum has been working with a handful of Liberian lawmakers. One of them is the Chair of the workshop - Honorable Gabriel B. Smith. In 2010, together with the Liberian Parliament and UNREC, the Forum held an international parliamentary conference for West Africa in Monrovia, gathering parliamentarians from the whole sub-region.

Mrs. Dybeck wished to introduce the participants to the concept of National Parliamentary Networks in order to work more focused in their home parliament and receiving the support they need for this. Such support will help keep the issues on the agenda in-between international meeting and can include improving and revising national legislation on firearms, initiating dialogue with other actors; governmental/NGO/private sector, organizing awareness raising activities and seminars on current topics as well as developing and submitting motions to the government.

The Liberian lawmakers were encouraged to join the Forum to share experiences internationally as well as to create a national network of parliamentarians interested in armed violence prevention issues. However, the Forum is well aware that legislators are very busy and need support in these endeavors. Members of the Forum can therefore receive support from the Forum and its secretariat for a variety of activities including improving domestic firearms legislations, researching areas for policy making, improving oversight of arms and ammunition storages, awareness raising activities and so forth.

Since the seminar had the honor of the presence of a Senator and the Chairman of the Committee for

Defense and National Security he chose to give the floor to them during the session.

Chairman of the Committee of Defense and National Security, Honorable Representative George Sylvester Mubah said it is time to rise against armed violence in Liberia. The country is still at risk. In his home county in the interior, which is where the war to a large part was fought, they recently had discovered a large sock of arms stored in an old well. If there was to be a comprehensive community sensitization campaign to help uncover these hidden arms, Liberia would be completely free of arms.

Honorable Senator Henry W. Yallah, Member of the Defense Committee noted that there appears to be little understanding of this kind of violence in Liberia. Today this is not an issue of war lords but of normal civilians that choose to take up arms. He also stressed the role of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) which will soon depart. When this happens the security will be in the country's own hands and this must be taken seriously.

Hon. Smith ended the opening session and said that despite intensive efforts made by the international community to end the war, the country is still experiencing the use of SALW by individuals. The war started with looting and armed robbery and the country continues to suffer from this. He challenged the passive approach often taken on the issue and said that a solution is needed within Liberia, through mutual engagement by raising awareness about the dangers of SALW pose to the country. Legislators and members of civil society must work together to ensure that the proliferation of SALW into the country is reduced. As a concrete example he suggested reinforcing and supporting community watch teams. The population, especially the youth as they are the group most prone to violence, needs to be educated that armed violence can never be the ultimate solution to problems. However he also wanted to remind his colleagues in Europe that although Africans may cause violence, European countries are responsible for most of the production of arms. He called for mutual agreements to address this.



Grand Bassa County Representatives, Gabriel B. Smith (standing), Member of Parliamentary Forum discusses the role of the Forum from the Liberian perspective

The Role of Parliament in preventing armed violence and controlling SALW

Honorable Representative Alex C. Grant spoke about the role of parliamentarians in controlling SALW. Parliamentarians have the mandate to introduce new laws and review existing ones in the interest of the public. However, they are not alone in this task but all citizens have a responsibility to approach their legislators with ideas. This is why they have elected them as representatives. As member of the constituencies they have empowered their representative to act. Weapons are necessary in order to protect the nation and the people who live there. He noted that they are also legitimately used for hunting and in farming to protect crops. The dangers of SALW come from who use them and in what context and how they can be kept safe. He reminded that talking is always better than fighting.

Honorable Smith agreed and added that parliamentarians also have a key role to play to curb the proliferation of small arms by ensuring justice and that this is based on appropriate laws. Civil society also has a major role in this regard.

Ms. Vivian Dogbey from the Liberia National Commission on Small Arms (LiNCSA), thanked the organizers for the floor and explained that LiNCSA had been established in 2006 as part of the ECOWAS Convention. She noted that internationally she often had to explain why Liberia and other West African countries have commissions set out to deal with small arms and would then explain that these are the kind of weapons that are and have been relevant for the conflicts in the region. The wars were fought with SALW not with aircrafts and heavier kinds of weaponry.

LiNCSA coordinates all government institutions that deal with SALW in some way and is there to gather information on firearms and to formulate policies on the issue. These findings are presented to the Parliament and she encouraged legislators to take active part in their work.

She also noted that LiNCSA is a stakeholder of LAVO which collects data and presents findings to policy makers.

Mr. Jeremiah S. Collins, Project Coordinator of the Liberia Armed Violence Observatory provided the findings and functions of LAVO since its establishment. He elucidated that Liberia is emerging from the debris of 14 years of civil insurgency and there is no doubt that post war Liberia is characterized by societal vices, to include armed violence. Every part of Liberia is affected by armed violence. He said LAVO is the collaboration among government of Liberia ministries and agency, civil society, international NGOs and donor organizations. LAVO comprises 20 stakeholders and has the function to gather, analyze, disseminate and publish armed violence data in line with the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development. Reporting on armed violence data will help policy makers and government at large to design programs that will address the reduction and prevention of armed violence. He said LAVO has been taken into account the three pillars of the Geneva Declaration; advocacy, measurability and programing.

Since the establishment of LAVO, three reports have been published and a number of advocacy and public awareness programs have been undertaken. LAVO reports on armed violence are graphically detailed and analyzed to provide information on perpetrators, places of incidents, victims, type of weapons used, timeline and outcome of incidents, type of violence and nationalities of those involved. Additionally, armed violence data are collected from official data sources that include: Liberian National Police (LNP), the United Nation Police in Liberia (UNPOL), hospitals and other sources that deal with armed violence data.

The findings of LAVO over the past two years include:

1. The Liberia National Police is the highest data providers followed by UNPOL;
2. Single sources of data amount to the highest data gathered while multiple sources account for small amount;
3. Most of the incidents or violence recorded by LAVO showed that majority of the armed violence cases occurred in the capital Monrovia;
4. Assault and armed robberies are the most common types of armed violence in Liberia. Weapons most commonly used are knives, razor blade, stick, cutlass followed by firearms;
5. In most incidents or violence, weapons that are used are bladed weapons and blunt objects. The finding shows that firearms are less used;
6. The most common outcomes are injuries and theft;
7. The majority of all the offenders and victims are male youths;
8. Both the offenders and victims are in their youthful age between 18-35 years old and;
9. For nationality, Liberians are the highest offenders and victims of armed violence followed by Guineans.

LAVO reports weekly, monthly, quarterly and annually. LAVO has a very good database set to keep track of all armed violence cases that are reported. The reports of LAVO are also published on the website to give a clear picture of armed violence in Liberia.

What Role can Lawmakers play in the long-term sustainability of LAVO?

Ms. Maimuna M. Turay, Acting Director Humanitarian Values at the Liberian Red Cross Society spoke on how legislators can support LAVO. The Liberia Red Cross Society is one of the key stakeholders of LAVO. She highlighted the following points:

- Armed violence is serious national issue and requires the collective efforts of all stakeholders.

- LAVO is an institution still in development and many things such as what legal status it should have and how LAVO will be funded after donor funding are being discussed.
- Should the stakeholders decide that it should be legislated or the purpose of state funding will count heavily on those of you that here to champion this cause.
- LAVO secretariat will be at the Kofi Institute of Conflict Transformation. If there is no legislation the legislature could incorporate funding for LAVO through the University of Liberia. or even the Ministry of Justice.
- The bottom line is that LAVO will need funding to continue to gather, analyze and publish incidents of armed violence in Liberia. Liberia is one of the original signatories of the Geneva Declaration on armed violence and Development which puts our country under the obligation to take measures for a reasonable reduction and prevention of armed violence by the year 2015.
- To create awareness on the negative impact of armed violence, determine the scope and scale of the occurrence of incidents of armed violence and to influence government and policymakers to design programs to address the root causes of armed violence will require your support.



Maimuna Turay of the Liberia National Cross Society, a LAVO stakeholder, strikes a point as lawmakers look on

Working groups

The participants of the program were divided in two groups to discuss the role lawmakers can play in the long term sustainability of LAVO in combating Armed Violence in Liberia and what can Civil Society and the National Legislature do to enact laws that will prevent Armed Violence. Recommendations or suggestions were given by these groups.

Group 1

Question: collaboration between civil society and legislators on the enactment of law(s) on small arms

Points:

1. Make a petition or formulate a draft law and engage the relevant lawmakers to solicit advice on how to proceed.
2. Place regulations and statues on small arms and involve other key actors (ICRC) for neutrality
3. Medium of communications through reports which will help lay the basis for legislators to make necessary policies/laws
4. Civil society organizations can play the advocating role in petitioning legislators to enact laws on small arms
5. A proposed focal point group/committee made up of legislators and civil society organizations' members to guide the proposed bill process and seek important information. The focal point(s) will take sponsorship of the proposed bill or civil society(ies) proposed the bill and engage the PGA (Parliamentarian for Global Actions – consisting of 26 law makers) for sponsorship and guidance through the various processes

Group 2



The above pictorial represents group two brainstorming on the Topic: What can be done by legislators and civil society in the prevention of small arms and light weapons? The below suggestions or recommendations are the result of the group brainstorming.

1. Civil society should always acquaint Legislature of small arms and light weapons related crime by providing reports
2. Broadening the scope of authority of the small arms commission so as to emerge LAVO with the commission
3. Enact arms control law that provides for arms registration before acquisition and usage
4. LAVO should be an independent autonomous observatory body
5. LAVO should be enacted into law indicating the function and budgetary allotment

Closing

Mrs. Dybeck gave the closing remarks where she thanked all participants for the fruitful discussions. She noted that it had indeed been very productive to have legislators, government representatives and civil society in one room as this is when good ideas can be created. Civil society has the knowledge of what is happening on the ground while legislators have the power and knowledge on how to put these ideas into policy. While we may not be able to eliminate armed violence, we all must work together to reduce and prevent it. On that note, Hon. Smith closed the seminar and invited all participants to lunch.

End notes:

AOAV and LAVO have agreed to make follow up with the legislators who decided to become members of the Forum and include them in the work of LAVO to analyze the armed violence situation and generate programmatic responses to the issues identified.

The event was covered by Liberian media and articles were published in:

New Democrat, Thursday May 30, 2013

Informer, Friday May 31, 2013

New Democrat, Tuesday June 5, 2013

Conclusion

The Forum of the parliamentary event for members of the Liberian National Legislature was held and ended with some good recommendations or suggestions for the prevention and reduction of the proliferation of SALW in Liberia. At least 24 people participated. The recommendations include but are not limited to:

- Civil society should always acquaint Legislature of small arms and light weapons related crime by providing reports
- Broadening the scope of authority of the small arms commission so as to emerge LAVO with the commission
- Enact arms control law that provides for arms registration before acquisition and usage
- LAVO should be an independent autonomous observatory body
- LAVO should be enacted into law indicating the function and budgetary allotment
- Community watch teams should be reinforced and supported.
- European countries are responsible for most of the production of arms in Africa so there is a need for mutual agreements to address this.
- If there was to be a comprehensive community sensitization campaign to help uncover these hidden arms, Liberia would be completely free of arms.

The Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons is the only permanent global network of parliamentarians related to the specific matters of arms control and armed violence prevention. Mrs. Dybeck introduced the concept of National Parliamentary Networks in order to work more focused in their home parliament and receiving the support they need for this. LAVO gave a clear picture of armed violence by outlining some findings of armed violence occurrence in Liberia. Some of these findings include bladed and blunt weapons that are mostly used by male youths from 18-35 to perpetrate violence. The findings showed that Monrovia is the place where mostly armed violence occurred. Arm robberies and assaults are the most prevalent violence in Liberia. The outcome of violence is injuries and theft as reported by LAVO.

AOAV pledged to continue working alongside with LAVO to fight armed violence in Liberia. The Regional Manager, Chris Lang also pledges to support LAVO until it can stand alone. LAVO has 20 stakeholders and was established to analyze, gather and report continuously to policy makers in line with the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development.

Recommendations

Based upon the brainstorming by participants during the program of the parliamentary forum for members of the Liberian National Legislature, the below points are recommended. These points are not permanent as they need to be debated upon in the house of parliament.

- ✓ That civil society should always acquaint the Legislature of SALW related violence by providing reports;
- ✓ That the scope of authority of the small arms commission (LiNCSA) should be broadened so as to emerge LAVO with the commission;
- ✓ That there should be an enactment of arms control law that provides for arms registration before acquisition and usage;
- ✓ That LAVO should be an independent autonomous observatory body;
- ✓ That LAVO should be enacted into law indicating the function and budgetary allotment;
- ✓ That community watched teams should be reinforced and supported;
- ✓ That European countries are responsible for a large proportion of production of arms hence there is a need for mutual agreements to address this;
- ✓ That there should be an comprehensive community sensitization campaign to help uncover the hidden arms in Liberia

Appendices

Participants

Name	Representative of District/ County
Hon. Henry W. Yallah	Senator Bong County
Hon. Numene T. H. Bartekwa	Representative, Grand Kru, Dist. 2
Hon. Bhofal Chambers	Representative, Maryland, Dist. 2
Hon. Alex Chersia Grant	Representative Grand Gedeh, Dist. 3
Hon. Jefferson S. Kanmoh	Representative, Sinoe Dist. Dist. 1
Hon. Edward W. Karfiah	Representative, Bong Dist. 5
Hon. Sam Van Kesselly, Jr	Representative, Rivercess, Dist. 2
Hon. George Sylvester Mubah	Representative and Chairman, Defense and National Security Committee
Hon. J. Gabriel Nyenka	Representative, Montserrado, Dist. 11
Hon. Lester M. Paye	Representative, Bong, Dist. 4
Hon. Haja Fata Siryon	Representative, Bomi, Dist. 3
E. Ekeema A. Witherspoon	Assistant Minister Ministry of Internal Affairs
Vivian Dogbey	Liberia National Commission on Small Arms (LiNCSA)
William Z. Togba	Ministry of justice
Chris Lang	MRU Regional Manager Action on Armed Violence (AOAV)
Martin Kerkula	AVO Manager Action on Armed Violence (AOAV)
Jeremiah S. Collins	Project Coordinator Liberia Armed Violence Observatory
Prince Higgins	Database Administrator Liberia Armed Violence Observatory
Maimuna M. Turay	Acting Director Humanitarian Values Liberian Red Cross
Teresa Dybeck	Programme Officer Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons
Philip M Kollie	West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) Liberia
Boakai Kamma	Fabric Radio
Helnor Zortel	Press/Independent
Alex Noah	Press/Independent



A cross session of legislators, civil society and media

Maimuna Turay of the Liberia National Cross Society Propounding legislative support to LAVO as Liberia National Red Cross is one of the key stakeholders to LAVO. She said LAVO is still at the infant stage and need budgetary allotment and need to be independent. She stresses that violence is a serious problem in Liberia and need all stakeholders to play their role.



Grand Bassa County Representatives, Gabriel B. Smith (standing), Member of Parliamentary Forum discusses the role of the Forum from the Liberian perspective.

Hon. Smith said SALW continues to pose a threat in Liberia and despite the intervention of International communities; SALW is still used by individuals in Liberia. Furthermore, armed violence is not only the use of arm but it also involves the use of bladed and blunt weapons.



The participants were divided into two groups to discuss the role lawmakers can play in the long term sustainability of LAVO in combating armed violence in Liberia and what can civil society and the National Legislature do to enact laws that will prevent armed violence. This group discussed the topic: What can be done by legislators and civil society in the prevention of small arms and light weapons? The above picture displayed group 2 co-chaired by Mr. Jeremiah S. Collins, LAVO Project Coordinator. Suggestions or recommendations were reached by this group.