



PARLIAMENTARY FORUM
ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

Newsletter May 2020

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Honourable Members and Friends of the Forum,

The world is currently undergoing a challenging period due to the pandemic of COVID-19. On behalf of the Secretariat of the Forum, I want to highlight that we are aware of the difficult situation that our Members, parliamentarians globally, as well as other stakeholders, are facing. **The spread of the coronavirus has severe human, social and economic impacts worldwide and affects us all as a society, as human beings and organisations.**

Parliamentarians are central in tackling the ongoing crisis and, among other things, the crucial parliamentary role relates to passing emergency laws, allocating resources and scrutinising government actions. The way we live has changed, meaning that social distancing and isolation measures also apply to parliaments. Under these special circumstances **it is key to ensure that parliamentarians are able to continue to carry out the vital work under safe and adequate conditions.**

Recently, the United Nations (UN) Secretary General António Guterres made a [call for global ceasefire](#) urging warring parties to put down their weapons in order to counter the pandemic together. This important appeal was endorsed by 70 UN Member States, religious leaders and warring parties in over 10 countries. Moreover, as also pointed out by the UN Secretary General, violence outside of the battlefield must be addressed, as **a surge of domestic violence cases has been observed** in the past weeks globally.

This reflects the importance of continuing our common efforts for global sustainable development and peace. **As Members and Friends of the Forum, you all play a vital role in our joint work to reduce armed violence**, by raising awareness and taking action to contribute to a more peaceful and sustainably developed world. The Secretariat continues to work hard in this direction, aware that our Members and collaboration partners across the globe also realise determined efforts.

With this letter I would like to share with you the efforts by the Forum since the last newsletter in October 2019. A number of highly qualitative and successful activities were realised during this period, accounted for in detail below. **Looking back at a productive year 2019**, the Forum carried out a total of **7 key activities**, whereof 3 regional seminars, 2 side events and 2 national seminars. Through these activities, nearly **140 parliamentarians** and additionally more than **130 stakeholders** from civil society, governments, and international organisations were reached. Moreover, nearly **50 parliamentarians** joined the Forum as new members.

I would also like to take the opportunity to give a brief update on coming activities. Naturally, as for the whole society, the pandemic **COVID-19 and its consequences is a factor of uncertainty affecting the planning of the Forum in the upcoming period.** Based on recommendations from relevant expert authorities, and in dialogue with the Forum's Board and collaboration partners,

the Forum has decided to postpone its physical international activities planned for the nearest months, now tentatively planned for later this year. However, the Secretariat, together with its partners, is closely monitoring the situation and applies flexibility in its planning. **The safety and health of our Members, collaboration partners and staff is vital for us, and it is also a societal responsibility to curb the spread of the pandemic.**

To stay tuned on further updates on coming activities, please follow us on our social media channels [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). Please do not hesitate to contact us and share news with us on the important work you are doing!

Stay safe and healthy!

Kind regards,

Karin Olofsson

Secretary General

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[Armed violence destroys lives and societies - watch our new short film on its impact](#)

Past events:

Regional seminar in the Latin American and Caribbean Parliament

On November 7-8 2019, **The Forum organised a regional seminar in cooperation with, and at the venue of, the long-standing partner the Latin-American and Caribbean Parliament (Parlatino)**, titled “Connecting the dots: Supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the ATT and the UN PoA through strengthened parliamentary commitment and action in international processes” in Panama. In total, 50 participants took part in the seminar, including 37 parliamentarians from 15 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, representatives from the UN, diplomatic community and civil society. **The focus of the seminar was on preventing and reducing SALW-related violence to increase human security through parliamentary action, including the gender**

quality perspective. An exchange was realised on experiences, results, challenges and opportunities related to the work of parliamentarians on this topic. As an outcome of the discussions, **participating parliamentarians adopted a [Parliamentary Action Plan with main conclusions and recommendations](#)** for parliamentary action to prevent and reduce armed violence. The final report from the seminar can be accessed [here](#) (in Spanish).

The Forum participates in workshops - by United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific, in Fiji & Nepal

Together with parliamentarians from the region and civil society actors (CSOs), the Secretary General Karin Olofsson participated on behalf of the Forum as **expert speaker and moderator in a regional workshop in Suva, Fiji** organised by the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific (UNRCPD) on “Gun Violence and Illicit Small-Arms Trafficking from a Gender Perspective” on November 12-15, 2019. The purpose of the workshop was to **enhance understanding of the gendered impacts of gun violence and build capacity** of parliamentarians and CSOs among **the Pacific Island States**. The Secretary General shared knowledge about the relevance of joint engagement of parliamentarians and CSOs on arms control for sustainable development and peace. Moreover, **the Secretary General participated as expert and moderator in UNRCPD’s regional seminar in Nepal on 4-6 March 2020**, which was the concluding step in this vital initiative by UNRCPD of the three sub-regional workshops to enhance capacity among participating parliamentarians and CSOs to take action and address the gendered impacts of gun violence in the region.

Seminar in the Swedish Parliament

The Forum realised a fully-seated seminar in the **Swedish Parliament** hosted by Swedish parliamentarians Hon. Olle Thorell and Hon. Karin Enström and in collaboration with the organisation Swedish Development Partner IM on December 17th 2019. **A total of 55 parliamentarians, representatives from the government, civil society, the private sector and the diplomatic community** attended the successful and productive seminar, including Forum Member Hon. Sabrine Ghoubantini, from Tunisia, who shared conclusions from the Forum’s regional seminar in the Middle East and Northern Africa, realised in Amman, September 2019. The focus of the seminar in Sweden was on **armed violence and its links to gender equality with a global outlook**, specifically to increase awareness of how actors can collaborate and contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 on Justice, Peace and Strong Institutions. Find the [seminar report here](#).

International Parliamentary Meeting in New York on the Disarmament agenda of the Secretary General of United Nations and the parliamentary handbook ‘Assuring our Common Future: A Guide to Parliamentary Action in support of Disarmament for Security and Sustainable Development.’

An international parliamentary meeting on the Disarmament Agenda released by the UN’s Secretary General **“[Securing our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament](#)”** took place on February 19 in New York, in conjunction with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Annual

Hearings at the UN. The meeting was sponsored by the [Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations](#), [Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament](#), [Inter-Parliamentary Union](#), [Parliamentarians for Global Action](#), [Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons](#), [Geneva Centre for Security Policy](#) and [World Future Council](#). It was supported by the [UN Office for Disarmament Affairs](#) and the [Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN](#).

The Forum welcomes the vital initiative, and Vice-President Hon. Dr Raphael Chegeni from Tanzania and Secretary General Karin Olofsson were present to share the experiences from the Forum. **The purpose of the meeting was to highlight the role of parliamentarians in advancing the Agenda, as well as to prepare the parliamentary handbook** entitled “Assuring our Common Future: A Guide to Parliamentary Action in support of Disarmament for Sustainable Development.” The work and discussions related to the handbook are still taking place, where the Forum will contribute as co-sponsor and to the content of the handbook.

The Forum participates in conference by the Gender Equality Network for Small Arms Control, in Berlin

On behalf of the Forum, **President Hon. Daisy Tourné from Uruguay** participated actively in a conference on February 20-21, 2020, in Berlin on “**Gender Equality Small Arms Control- Towards Bullet Proof Inclusion**” hosted by the Gender Equality Network for Small Arms Control (GENSAC) together with the German Federal Foreign Office and Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies. The important conference brought together over 80 actors, including parliamentarians, experts, representatives from the security sector, academics and diplomats on **the issue of arms control, conflict prevention, gender equality and development** in Africa, Europe and Latin American and the Caribbean.

Social media campaign: #WordsOverBullets

The Forum’s social media campaign **#WordsOverBullets** was carried out between 7-17th of December 2019. The purpose of the campaign was to raise global awareness on the importance of parliamentary action for prevention and reduction of SALW- related violence. Thank you all, **Members and Friends of the Forum from all parts of the world contributing with photos and key messages in short videos to share experiences and recommendations on actions for more peaceful and sustainably developed societies!**

Recently published opinion pieces

One of the cornerstones of the Forum’s work is raising awareness on the effects of armed violence and possible ways for its prevention. As part of this work, and in connection to the seminar in the Swedish Parliament, the Forum published an [opinion piece](#) (in Swedish) on the online platform Utvecklingsmagasinet highlighting the importance of partnerships, specifically including women, for prevention and reduction of armed violence and its gendered effects globally. It was co-signed by Swedish parliamentarians, CSOs and the private sector. The Forum also published the opinion piece “[Parliamentary action- A vital cornerstone for curbing the uncontrolled flow of small arms and light weapons in Lebanon](#)” co-signed by a Lebanese Forum Member, Hon. Elias

Hankach on the topic of preventing armed violence in Lebanon which was widely distributed on social media.

Ongoing and upcoming events:

Call for action – please sign and spread the word!

In times when democracy is under pressure, while at the same time conflicts and armed violence is on the rise, global parliamentary action is more vital than ever to contribute to peaceful and sustainably developed societies. However, the future of the Forum is uncertain due to shifting donor priorities. Therefore, **the Forum has launched a [Call for Action](#)** to highlight the vital role of parliamentarians to prevent the uncontrolled flow of SALW. **We welcome you all to sign the [petition online](#), as a parliamentarian or any other actor, if you agree on the importance to prevent and reduce armed violence globally. Please spread the word and share the link**, together we can contribute to human security, peace and sustainable development worldwide!

UN PoA, BMS 7

The **Seventh Biennial Meeting of States (BMS 7)** on the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects ([UN PoA](#)) is planned to take place between 15-19 June this year. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, confirmation of its realisation is still pending, thus, the Forum's plans to participate at the **BMS 7** are tentative. Regardless of the time and modus in which the BMS 7 will take place, the Forum would like to highlight the importance of the advancement of the implementation of the **UN PoA**, as an opportunity to approach governments and public institutions in the review of the status of different policies related to SALW control and armed violence reduction. In this process, **parliamentarians have an essential role to play, and the Forum is certainly looking forward to support and strengthen parliamentary representation in the UN PoA process.** Let us remind ourselves that conflicts, criminality and human rights abuses continue, and the work to curtail armed violence is even more complex in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Sixth Conference of State Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty

The **Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) Sixth Conference of State Parties (CSP6)** is set to take place from 17-21 August 2020. However, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, previous ATT Working Group meetings and the Informal Preparatory meeting have been postponed to a later date. The ATT is one of the key international instruments in curbing the uncontrolled proliferation of SALW, contributing to the efforts for more peaceful societies.

Despite the advances in the consolidation of the ATT, compliance with the Treaty is still a challenge, as there are cases of State Parties, countries, still acting in ways that contradict the spirit of the Treaty. For instance, some states carry on with arms exports to countries involved directly

in actions that are in violation of international humanitarian law. In relation to this, some countries have faced legal actions promoted by civil society organisations, that have led to the cease of arms exports. Parliamentarians in different countries, including Members of the Forum, have played a key role in the universalisation and implementation of the Treaty, and have a vital responsibility to hold their governments accountable. For CSP6, the Forum continues with plans to participate in order to bring the parliamentary perspective in the discussions, monitoring further notice from the organisers due to the developments related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly, Kigali, Rwanda

The **142nd Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly** was planned to take place from 16 to 20 April 2020 in Geneva, where the Forum aimed to hold a side event. Following national and international measures to tackle the spread of COVID-19, the [Assembly was postponed](#) by the IPU and is due to take place in **Kigali, Rwanda, from 11 to 15 October 2020**. The Forum is looking forward to contribute with parliamentary perspectives on armed violence reduction and prevention in the discussions and work of the IPU.

General Assembly of the Forum – in conjunction with regional seminar

The time has come for the Forum to hold its biennial **General Assembly**, the highest organ of the Forum. The Assembly is the opportunity for a representative selection of the Forum's membership to **meet and discuss the recent achievements and challenges of the organisation, share national, regional and international experiences, and provide strategic feedback for the future actions of the organisation as well as to elect the Board of the Forum for the up-coming period**. The Forum, in cooperation with the [South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons \(SEESAC\)](#) and the [Regional Cooperation Council](#), will hold the General Assembly in conjunction with a regional seminar, in relation to current relevant policy discussions and guarantee key political anchorage. The tentative dates agreed for the General Assembly are December 10-11 2020, but having in mind the current pandemic, the Forum is working closely with the partners mentioned to revise the tentative date, should the circumstances require it as to safeguard the health of the Forum's Members, partners and staff.

Regional seminar in the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, Indonesia

The Forum, as part of its continuing efforts to consolidate its membership and work in Asia, has reached an agreement with the [ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly \(AIPA\)](#), to hold a joint seminar "Connecting the Dots: Enhancing Implementation of the Women, Peace & Security, UN PoA and 2030 Agendas – through increased parliamentary engagement and action in international processes". This seminar is a follow up to the [2018 "Connecting the Dots" seminar](#), and the **focus will be on strengthening the gender perspective in relation to relevant international arms control instruments**. Due to the current pandemic, the seminar, which was supposed to take place mid-May, has been tentatively postponed to late September. Based on the development of the COVID-19 pandemic, we will inform our Members when the new date has been fully confirmed.

Regional seminar in the Pan-African Parliament, South Africa

The Forum is currently in discussion with the [Pan-African Parliament](#) to hold a seminar during late 2020. The aim of the initiative is to follow up on the [results of the seminar](#) held in [October 2019](#), and support parliamentary initiatives within the over-all theme of the African Union year 2020 on "[Silencing the Guns](#)".

Contribute with your own stories

We are very interested in hearing **stories from you, as our Members and Friends**, and make visible your vital efforts around the world as a part of our awareness raising- and communication work. Therefore, we want to **kindly encourage you to contribute with your own personal experiences and initiatives** that you are or/and have been part of in your local or national settings, for example related to tackling armed violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. **Please contact the Secretariat** if you have an initiative you would like us to share with the Forum's Members and Friends: texier@parlforum.org.