Clarifying Regional Human Security Priorities

Building Support for a Nuclear Weapons Convention | Curbing the Illicit Trade in Small Arms
Ensuring Women’s Full Participation in Peace Processes

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Under the able direction of Dr. Carlos Vargas, Global Action completed the latest in a series of workshops to inspire regional governments and civil society organizations to weigh in on key UN security priorities, including important events taking place in 2010. Our Costa Rica workshop, “Clarifying Regional Human Security Priorities,” solicited thoughtful guidance from regional experts and policymakers on the development of collaborative, integrated human security policies that can inform, enrich and inspire upcoming General Assembly and Security Council deliberations.

A group of 28 participants from the Foreign Ministry of Costa Rica, the UN-mandated University for Peace and other universities and civil society organizations gathered at the beautiful home of former First Lady Karen Figueres to comment on regional needs in reference to four major events: The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Review, the Biennial Meeting of States on Small Arms, the beginning of formal negotiations on an Arms Trade Treaty, and the 10th anniversary of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. The focus of the workshop sessions was to crystallize regional recommendations for action on these four major events. A late afternoon session led by Dr. Robert Zuber and Dr. Carlos Vargas was devoted entirely to putting into words the security needs and aspirations of the regional participants to share with UN officials and delegates.

The workshop session on the ‘NPT and the Nuclear Weapons Convention’ was introduced by Dr. Carlos Vargas with commentary provided by Dr. Manuel Araya Incera of the University of Costa Rica. The presentation focused on the leadership taken by Costa Rica in promoting a nuclear weapons convention at the United Nations – seen by most participants in the room as the best means for providing a transparent, verifiable and irreversible process leading to the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. Carlos and Manuel both called attention to the ‘uselessness’ of armed forces from a security standpoint and reaffirmed the ‘faith’ needed to continue to take political risks and persevere towards nuclear abolition and more humane global governance.
The session on the BMS and the global arms trade was led by Dr. Robert Zuber of Global Action with commentary from Dr. Carlos Alberto Cordero, Disarmament Minister of the Costa Rican Foreign Ministry. The focus of this session was to clarify the Central American stake in the elimination of illicit small arms and the international control of the global arms trade. As Dr. Cordero noted, Costa Rica has been a consistent leader in promoting a global treaty to curb the illicit arms trade. Dr. Zuber remarked that the illicit trade in small arms is a regional problem with implications more for criminality than for insurgency. He also noted that the proposed Arms Trade Treaty, while not a disarmament treaty per se, will provide regulatory coherence that civil society can use to highlight and address the illegal movement of arms, with a special focus on regulation of arms (‘end use certification’) that might be used to commit atrocity crimes or otherwise abuse human rights.

The session on Women, Peace and Security was led by Jenneth Macan Markar of Global Action with commentary from Professor Ameena Al Rasheed of the University for Peace. The focus of both presentations was on implementation of Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889. The Resolutions focus on “prevention, participation and protection” of women in all aspects of peacemaking, peace building and peacekeeping, and also clarify state obligations to promote women’s rights and women’s access. Given the complexity of the Resolutions, the first session goal was to clarify the obligations they establish and then to examine possible next steps for implementation from a regional perspective. Professor Al Rasheed of Sudan reinforced the necessity to develop Resolution 1325 based National Action plans, both in the region and in Costa Rica. A lively discussion then followed among participants about ways to strengthen regional commitments to enhanced participation by women in peace processes.

Excellent supporting comments were shared by all participants, especially in the final session devoted to producing and endorsing recommendations to help shape the four major UN events. Along the way, we were graced by special remarks delivered by our host, H.E. Karen Olsen de Figueres, former Member of Parliament and First Lady of Costa Rica; Director General of the Foreign Ministry Victor Monge, the new Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Carlos Roversi; and John J. Maresca, Rector of the UN-mandated University for Peace. Access to the full program, powerpoint presentations, speeches and related materials will soon be available at www.globalactionpw.org.

The choice of Costa Rica for this seminar was related to several important factors:

- Costa Rica’s prominent role at the United Nations on many disarmament and civilian protection issues, both as a leader and convener of other nations interested in fortifying their human security commitments. Costa Rica’s determined search for peace and the defense of human rights demonstrates again and again that influence on the global stage does not necessarily require military or economic power.
- Our close connections to Dr. Carlos Vargas and well as Dr. Virginia Cawagas and Dr. Toh, Swee-Hin of the University for Peace.
- The gracious offer of Former First Lady Figueres to use her home for this workshop, including the use of the conference table on which her husband, former President Figueres, negotiated the abolition of the Costa Rican Armed Forces in 1949.
Outcomes

Often positive outcomes from our workshops are not clear until months at a point when relationships have solidified and new program opportunities have had time to germinate. In this instance, we have much to report at an early stage.

- A commitment from the Rector of U Peace to review his disarmament education priorities and to call on GAPW and our local partners for advice on how to make U Peace disarmament education offerings more robust and relevant to what takes place at the UN.
- A commitment from the new disarmament officer for Foreign Affairs to consult with GAPW on small arms, civilian protection and peacekeeping issues as they arise in the General Assembly or other UN contexts.
- A commitment from H. E. Karen Figueres to allow workshop participants to convene at her home on a monthly basis to review regional security needs and concerns.

Recommendations

There was strong consensus within the group that the UN and its member states need to take regional security priorities more seriously, especially during major review events and treaty negotiations. The following recommendations were endorsed by workshop participants during the final afternoon session.

Nuclear Weapons/Weapons of Mass Destruction

- Renew support for a binding Nuclear Weapons Convention
- Reinforce for smaller governments their obligations to exert moral authority and political influence in the nuclear field regardless of their levels of formal military power
- Remind governments to resist substituting the language and mindset of ‘elimination’ with the language of ‘reduction’
- Continue diplomatic action to abolish depleted nuclear weapons and other fissionable materials

Conventional Weapons/Arms Trade

- More disarmament education advocacy should be undertaken by the Office of Disarmament Affairs with national governments (referencing regional and international agreements that promote democratic governance)
- Promote within the international community a conventional weapons free zone for Latin America modeled on the Tlatelolco Treaty
- Ensure that Free Trade (WTO) agreements are not used as justifications for expansion of arms production facilities into countries and regions that do not want them
- States should ensure the expansion of disarmament and peace education programs within their borders
Women, Peace and Security

- Costa Rica should develop a national action plan on ‘1325’ as soon as possible that sets high standards for women’s participation in a variety of cultural, vocational and ethnic contexts, and promotes cultures of peace in diverse communities
- States should insist that national gender advisors put in place as part of a ‘1325’ implementation strategy have real decisionmaking authority (not merely advisory)
- Indicators of progress on gender participation should be developed that are robust, culturally specific and integrate vertical elements (age, educational levels, etc.) to ensure accuracy and inclusiveness
- Insist that the Security Council do all it can to ensure that member states honor their obligations to create and implement national ‘1325’ action plans
- Promote access by diverse women to UN events (ie. the Commission on the Status of Women) focused on women’s participation as well as to UN-based decision makers on gender issues

Thanks to the Ira Wallach Fund, we anticipate strong, enduring connections between GAPW, the government of Costa Rica, the University for Peace, and a wide variety of regional civil society organizations working on women’s issues, genocide prevention, conventional disarmament and other core human security issues with important ramifications for global governance.

With this workshop, we have completed this cycle of regional activities on civilian protection, human security and global governance. While we will continue later this year with regional briefings in Uruguay and Japan, the next phase of our work will be devoted to translating the findings, insights, recommendations and seeded activities into a viable network of programs that can inspire diplomats and UN officials to do more to protect civilians from illegal weapons, gender violence, atrocity crimes and other threats to human security.