

Gender and Disarmament: Making Important Linkages to the ATT and PoA: A Policy Brief

Global Action to Prevent War and Armed Conflict (GAPW)

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I. Introducing Disarmament through a Gender Lens

At GAPW, promoting a robust human security agenda demands that we develop practical measures for reducing levels of global violence and removing institutional and ideological impediments to addressing armed violence, mass atrocities, and severe human rights violations at the earliest possible stages. In all these priorities, particular importance must be placed on full participation of women at all levels of decision making. Human security concerns, including but not limited to diversion in the arms trade, nuclear weapons proliferation and atrocity crime prevention, are multi-faceted and synergistically connected such that they require a cross-cutting response with multiple points of entry. As such, these issues neither operate in a vacuum nor can they be solved in isolation. In particular, a robust human security agenda demands that all sectors of the population, most especially women, are provided with a dependable security sector such that participation in public life is both feasible and realistic.

Gender equality is essential to the creation of a reliable security sector, in particular incorporating women's agency. Generally speaking, women are often under-represented in social and political life as they tend to have limited access to education, employment, health care services, reproductive rights, police and judicial protections. They are also often targets of rape and other forms of sexual violence.¹ In addition, traditional notions that women are subordinate or second-class citizens can have an impact on instances of family violence and abuse, forced marriage, and forced circumcision, among others.² Integrating a gender lens into discussions on formation and sustainability of the security sector entails not only addressing women as part of vulnerable groups, but also encouraging the role of women as agents of change who have perspectives, skills and experiences to bring to decision-making in order to formulate effective security policies for both protection and holding perpetrators accountable.

Speaking to small arms control more specifically, more attention must be given to women's agency as contributors to the reduction and prevention of the flow of illicit arms. Illicit arms are one of the most pervasive threats to a dependable security sector, and illegally diverted arms from the legal market contribute to vast quantities of violence, lawlessness, and conflict. Furthermore, it is a fact that women are often disproportionately affected by this violence. Whether in conflict or post-conflict situations, small arms, including diverted arms from the legal trade, can have a direct or indirect effect on women as carriers of these weapons, as victims of domestic violence, as victims of conflict-related sexual violence, and even as protestors or actors in resistance movements.³ Gender-based violence, violence that either targets a woman because of her gender or has a disproportionate effect on women, impacts discrimination against women as it can affect the enjoyment of their fundamental rights such as the right to liberty and security, equal protection, and many others.⁴ With that in mind, women's participation in public and political life becomes increasingly more difficult, if not impossible, when communities are awash in illegal weapons and dependable security is elusive.

Promotion of the role of women in international peace and security, especially in political decision-making and peace processes, has been embedded in Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325, while SCR 1820 stresses that widespread and systematic sexual violence is a threat to international security.⁵ Women's participation in disarmament policies has also been laid out in General Assembly Resolution 65/69, in which the General Assembly recognizes the contributions women can have in disarmament, non-proliferation, and arms control policies and encourages relevant stakeholders to promote women's participation in all relevant decision-making processes.⁶ Furthermore, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women recalls that discrimination against women violates equality and is a barrier to participation. The Convention also reaffirms the commitment to disarmament and international peace and security,⁷ while the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has laid out in its general recommendations that states' parties protect women from violence suffered in social settings, including family and work.⁸

Bearing this in mind, incorporating a gender perspective into all arms control and disarmament processes is non-negotiable for GAPW. We seek to ensure that gender-related issues do not become exclusively 'soft issues.' A gender-balanced approach to disarmament, including full integration of women's skills, energies and experiences into efforts to curb the illicit trade in conventional arms and other disarmament measures, must command a higher security priority. As our colleagues at the Women's League for International Peace and Freedom (WILPF) have noted, gender-inclusive policies are necessary to effectively address these issues, while noting that gender-based violence is illegitimate and can seriously undermine the larger notions of peace and security.⁹

II. Small Arms and Women's Participation

Small arms and illegally diverted arms can pose a major cause of concern for international peace and security. This is most pertinent in terms of how small arms can affect women's participation. Arms can have a multi-faceted effect on women's participation as a major source and threat of violence. Small arms, especially illegally diverted arms, often play a role in cases of domestic violence against women and conflict-related sexual violence. Moreover, small arms represent a significant threat because they often deter women from participating because of security fears, for them as individuals as well as their families. Nonetheless, it is also important to understand that women can be weapon-carriers, especially as members of militias or armed groups from the national to the local level. Women can likewise promote a culture of guns, especially for the younger generation for which they are often responsible, and ultimately contribute to the proliferation of small arms. As our colleagues at the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) Women's Network note, the psychological trauma that is associated with the use, or threatened use, of small arms and the subsequent disruption to safety, is more acute amongst women than men, especially as women tend to have less access to judicial and police protection services.¹⁰

In this context, women have unique experiences, skills, and perspectives to bring to policy-making tables, which can ensure that the needs of women are addressed in discussions on arms control and rightly reflect the needs on the ground. Moving from theory to practice remains one of the biggest challenges that the international community must contend with in international peace and security. Gender-balanced perspectives must be incorporated at early stages of discussions in order to ensure that such policies are one step closer to being practicably implementable.

III. The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and the UN Programme of Action on small arms (UNPoA)

To tackle violations of women's human rights during conflict and promote participation in post-conflict reconstruction and policy making, actions must focus on prevention of conflict and all forms of violence. Such conflict prevention includes the effective and robust regulation of the arms trade (ATT) as well as appropriate control over the circulation of existing (and often illicit) small arms (UNPoA). Sufficient action toward effective disarmament and arms control is needed to ensure rights are upheld in the various phases of conflict and post-conflict transition.

The forthcoming ATT, to be negotiated in July 2012, will cover the international transfer of conventional arms and, hopefully, small arms and light weapons (SALWs) that often represent the most 'deadly' and difficult to trace weapon for the majority of states. It is hoped that the ATT, through its legally-binding nature, will provide for a strong humanitarian push to prevent human suffering caused by the illicit trade in arms as well as contribute to more sustainable and stable security sectors.

The UNPoA, adopted in 2001 and to be reviewed this August at its Second Review Conference, is a politically-binding framework for measures to prevent, combat, and eradicate the illicit trade in SALWs through measures related to important issues such as stockpile management and national legal frameworks. While the ATT will neither dry up any existing stockpiles nor address weapons already in circulation, it will focus on (how strongly and explicitly is still uncertain) diversion of weapons into the hands of terrorists, criminals, and corrupt officials. In concert with the UNPoA that does provide a framework for drying up stockpiles and eliminating weapons in circulation, the ATT has the opportunity to curb human suffering and armed violence caused by new instances of illicit trade in conventional weapons. These two instruments have more in common than has been generally thought given that each instrument has the potential to address illicit trade through different, but related, lenses.

Both of these key UN meetings – and the practical commitments which they generate -- must more fully integrate the particular skills and needs of women by highlighting their rightful place in political and peace processes. Of course, it is important recognize the progress that has been made regarding this important linkage between gender and disarmament, especially in the context of the Preparatory Committee (Prep Com) for this summer's Review Conference of the UNPoA. As our colleagues at the IANSA Women's Network report, not only did 52% of states represented at the Prep Com send women delegates to the Committee meeting, but also several member states, including Germany and the USA, as well as regional organizations referenced women's participation, gender mainstreaming and even SCR 1325.¹¹ While we, of course, acknowledge and appreciate such references and advances, we also encourage and promote further substantive linkages. There must be more awareness of the degree to which success negotiating an ATT and implementing the UNPoA are essential to creating a more dependable security sector, which, in turn, offers meaningful protection for women seeking opportunities to participate in political life.

IV. GAPW Recommendations

- Integrate gender into the implementation of the UNPoA in part through highlighting the negative linkages binding the illicit trade in arms and trafficking in drugs and human beings.
- Give special attention to the role of women in Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs, especially women's roles in community peacebuilding as well as to the particular

reintegration needs and stigmas of women ex-combatants and other young women who may have become pregnant while working in conflict zones.

- Pay greater policy attention to the complications that illicit small arms add to the process of post-conflict reconstruction as well as to the need for more direct participation by women in the policies and activities associated with all phases of disarmament, but especially post-conflict, civilian disarmament.
- Ensure that gender advisors and experts are available and willing to participate in discussions that will shape ATT and UNPoA policies to ensure that elements of women's participation and gender equality are fully integrated.
- Integrate gender language into the forthcoming ATT such that it adequately reflects the criterion that arms should not be transferred if there is established, sufficient risk that such arms will be diverted for the commission of mass rape and other forms of gender-based violence.

¹ See, CEDAW Committee, Concept Note, General Discussion on the Protection of Women's Human Rights in Conflict and Post-Conflict Contexts, p. 7.

² CEDAW Committee, General Recommendations No. 12, General Comment, 11.

³ See, Corey Barr and Sarah Masters, Why Women? Effective Engagement for Small Arms Control, IANSA p. 8-9.

⁴ See, CEDAW Committee General Recommendations, No. 12, General Comment 6-7.

⁵ SCR 1820, para. 1.

⁶ A/RES/65/69.

⁷ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, New York, 18 December 1979, see, Preamble.

⁸ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, General Recommendation No.12.

⁹ Outcome document, *Women, Arms Control, Disarmament, and Non-Proliferation*, International Women's Day seminar, Geneva, 7 March 2011, p. 5.

¹⁰ See, Corey Barr and Sarah Masters, Why Women? Effective Engagement for Small Arms Control, IANSA, p. 9

¹¹ IANSA Women's Network, Women and Gender at the PoA PrepCom: 19-23 March 2012, available at: <http://www.iansa-women.org/node/785>.