

Peoples' Disarmament

The 4th BMS provides the latest opportunity for the UN and its member states to assess efforts by the international community to curb illicit arms, reduce stockpiles and more effectively protect civilian populations impacted by criminality, insurgency and other misuses of small arms and light weapons.

This BMS has a distinctly different 'feel' to it than the recently concluded NPT process. While governments were certainly captivated and engaged by the recent drama of the NPT, they generally have more direct experience with the challenges of protecting citizens from the wide-ranging, negative impacts of illicit small arms and light weapons. We anticipate that this will generate considerable state interest in finding more creative ways to more completely implement the 2001 Program of Action (PoA) on Small Arms.

On the NGO side, the advocates who have come to New York to raise their voices at the BMS tend to be more culturally and ethnically diverse. While the number of NGOs at headquarters working on small arms issues is much smaller than their nuclear counterparts, the number of civil society organizations worldwide working on these issues is far greater. Small arms advocates are much more likely to integrate into their outreach and advocacy a much broader range of human security concerns, including the persistence of child soldiers and the impact of armed violence on community development. There is often a great sense of urgency conveyed by civil society groups working with diverse constituencies to close down pathways for illicit arms and prevent their return. At the same time, local groups have skills to offer governments and other state actors seeking to fulfill their small arms-related responsibilities.

Some of the larger security-related NGOs have decided to concentrate their attention on July's first round of negotiations on an Arms Trade Treaty, IANSA and other NGOs, however, remain focused on the BMS, knowing that there are agreements to be had that can help 'change the game' on human security. Ambassador Macedo of Mexico, the Chair of this BMS, has appointed capable and accessible 'Friends' who have consulted widely with NGO representatives and crafted skillful working 'non-papers' to help guide the discussions. Mr. Federico Perazza of the Permanent Mission of Uruguay (Small Arms Trade across Borders) and Ms. Sarah deZoten of the Permanent Mission of Australia (International Cooperation and Assistance) are two of the 'Friends' who have established helpful parameters for both government discussions and NGO engagement. The wise decision by Ambassador Macedo to suspend 'general debate' for this BMS helps ensure that there will be sufficient time to deliberate on key issues and push harder to strengthen follow up mechanisms towards full PoA implementation.

NGOs and civil society organizations that have come to the BMS represent diverse 'lenses' on the small arms problem and have different aspirations regarding this round of discussions. Some of the hoped for outcomes include the following:

- Border controls that can more effectively interdict illicit arms while preserving legitimate cultural, economic, humanitarian and familial activities for which accessible borders are indispensable
- Greater integration of the skills and capacities of local civil society to assist the work of governments and UN officials, educate local communities, identify the presence of illicit weapons, and even track their movements within countries and across borders
- A 'best practices' resource that can help governments learn from successful interactions between state and non-state actors to stem the flow of illicit arms
- More creative funding and capacity building strategies to ensure that ODA, other UN actors and their civil society counterparts have the resources needed to push for broader implementation of the PoA at UN headquarters, in national capitals, in regional organizations, and in communities.
- Infrastructure (research and information, local and national laws, enforcement mechanisms) needed to sustain a successful, robust system of marking and tracing small arms and light weapons
- Strong end-use certification of small arms transfers to ensure that recipients of such weapons do not use them to abuse the rights of or otherwise threaten civilian populations.

More than the nuclear or even arms trade issues, small arms discussions confirm the belief of many community leaders, NGOs and diplomats that human security is indivisible; that armed violence, persistent poverty, social development, women's participation and more are inextricably linked; that policymakers and community leaders share a common security interest; and that human security is larger than any one issue or weapons system.

The BMS is one place where security is fully embedded in community. We honor the diverse voices of the advocates who have come to New York to reinforce that linkage.