

of Action framework, while Parts Three and Four focus on relevant emerging issues and trends.

The present volume reflects IANSA's efforts to engage constructively with States and intergovernmental organizations, arguing not only for effective implementation of the Programme of Action and other instruments, but also for their development as living – not static – documents. In the view of IANSA, the international community needs up-to-date tools in order to respond to the evolving global threats posed by the misuse, diversion, and illicit proliferation of small arms, light weapons, and their ammunition.

I. Introduction

Poor management of weapons and ammunition is a matter of alarming concern. The easy availability and misuse of small arms and light weapons, and their ammunition, is a major problem in countries across all world regions, resulting in extensive human suffering and loss of life. Small arms and light weapons and their associated ammunition, can be misused and diverted to unauthorized recipients such as rebels, gangs, criminal organizations, pirates, and terrorist groups, producing havoc and harm on a massive scale.

The human costs of such proliferation and abuse – both direct and indirect costs – are enormous. Over the past decade, around 535,000 deaths have been caused each year directly by acts of violence, including armed violence.¹ The vast majority of these have occurred in countries wracked by violent crime and instability – not in war or armed conflict.² Yet non-conflict settings have received significantly less attention at the global

¹ Small Arms Survey, Monitoring Trends in Violent Deaths, Research Note Number 59, September 2016. Note that “self-inflicted violence” is not included in the total estimate, and estimates for deaths during “legal interventions” by law enforcement are reported very unevenly and probably underestimated. Additionally, deaths in armed conflict are difficult to estimate accurately, and non-conflict data on violent deaths is only estimated in 64 countries, half of them in Africa. For these reasons, great caution should be made in drawing international comparisons between some countries and regions. See Brian Wood, Preventing Crimes and Violent Deaths Involving Small Arms and Light Weapons, IANSA Briefing Paper, June 2017, reprinted below in this volume.

² Ibid. Of the 20 countries with high violent death rates of 20 deaths of more per 100,000 of their population in 2015, 11 were not affected by armed conflict.

level. Domestically, small arms and ammunition in the hands of civilians are often poorly regulated and are consequently involved in many preventable deaths and injuries.

Direct killings are only a fraction of the full costs of armed violence and conflict. Civil wars have become increasingly regionalized and internationalized, and the use of small arms and light weapons (SALW) often blurs the distinctions between armed conflict, crime, terror attacks, and State repression.

Gender inequalities are deepened and exacerbated by pervasive armed violence perpetrated by gangs and individual men in the grip of toxic masculinity. In general, men and boys are more often than women and girls the users, direct victims and perpetrators of violence and conflict with small arms and light weapons. However, because of gender inequalities and their roles in society, women and girls not only are victims of male abuse with guns but also suffer disproportionately in many ways from the economic, social, cultural and political costs of involvement by men and boys in armed violence and conflict. The changing face of global conflict has also had a particular and dramatic effect on women. Half the world's 68.5 million forcibly displaced people (25 million refugees, 3 million asylum seekers, and 40 million internally displaced persons) in 2017 were women or girls, according to the United Nations.³ Sexual violence is used as a tactic to displace populations, while the ideological opposition of many extremist armed groups to girls entering public spaces, including educational institutions, is increasingly used to justify brutal sexual exploitation.

Armed violence is a major public health concern. The more visible costs are the physical wounds suffered by the victims. The economic and emotional costs for victims, their families, and their friends are often less visible, but are also extremely important. In areas severely affected by arms and ammunition proliferation, children are more vulnerable to injury, death, displacement, psychosocial distress, and recruitment and use by armed forces and groups. Armed violence also comes at

³ UNHCR, *Global Trends – Forced Displacement in 2017*, available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>.

a very high economic cost to the society as a whole, as the health system has to deal with incoming emergencies from shot wounds, diverting essential resources from the overall system.

Crime and armed violence contribute to “unproductive” expenditures that divert public resources away from key services and capital investment. Poverty and unemployment resulting from armed conflict and pervasive armed violence, especially when coupled with a sense of historic marginalization, exacerbate intense grievances. Violent conflicts are strongly fuelled by natural resource exploitation and, according to one study, those conflicts experience an earlier and higher probability of relapse than others.⁴

In May 2018, the UN Secretary-General unveiled a new disarmament agenda recognizing the need to protect civilians from armed conflict and other forms of violence and criminality associated with the widespread availability and misuse of conventional arms, especially small arms and light weapons.⁵

“While we have seen stagnation in conventional arms control at the global level, the absence of disarmament and arms control at the regional, national and local levels has been disastrous. Owing in no small part to the widespread and increasing availability of military-grade and improvised weapons, armed conflicts have become protracted, more complex, more disruptive and more difficult to recover from. Non-State actors are increasingly well equipped, owing to poorly secured stockpiles or to transfers from the illicit market or from States. The growing complexity of contemporary conflict, when mixed with lax control on the means of lethal force, is a growing source of human insecurity.”⁶

⁴ Jasmine-Kim Westendorf, “Why Peace Processes Fail: Negotiating Insecurity After Civil War”, Lynne Rienner, 2015.

⁵ United Nations Secretary-General, *Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*, 24 May 2018, ISBN: 978-92-1-142329-7. <https://www.un.org/disarmament/sg-agenda/en/>.

⁶ Ibid, p. 33.

The Secretary-General reaffirmed that combatting the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons is necessary for the achievement of many of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, including those relating to peace, justice and strong institutions, poverty reduction, economic growth, health, gender equality, and safe cities and communities. He pointed out that *“The current paradigm of short-term and compartmentalized projects to address small arms control is not keeping up with the seriousness and magnitude of the problem ... [and] in the most affected countries, this issue needs sustained, integrated funding, providing all stakeholders – Governments, donors and implementers – with more opportunities, more coherence and more return on investment.”*⁷ At the country level in particular, the Secretary-General called for, amongst other things, the development of more effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels and the engagement of civil society, especially women, young people and affected communities in all phases of the disarmament and arms control processes.⁸

Taking action to address illicit transfer, destabilizing accumulation and misuse

Coordinated international, regional, and national action by governments is needed to prevent the illicit transfer, destabilizing accumulation and misuse of small arms, light weapons, and their ammunition. Thus, in 2001, Member States of the United Nations agreed a Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA) and have come together regularly since then to review implementation of the PoA. Civil society organisations have played a major role in promoting measures that are included in the PoA and subsequent outcome documents of meetings under the PoA, and in assisting States with information and raising public awareness of the direct and indirect human costs resulting from armed violence and conflict.

⁷ Ibid, p. 41.

⁸ Ibid, p. 66–70.

Civil society advocates have argued that it is vital to deal with all of the facets of this problem, and urged all governments to take action to prevent the illegal possession, trade, and diversion of such items; strictly regulate civilian and other holdings to prevent the uncontrolled spread; guarantee the safe and effective management, storage, and security of government stockpiles; and ensure the collection, recording, and destruction of surplus, seized, unmarked, or illicitly held weapons and ammunition. For civil society that means addressing existing inventories of weapons and ammunition as well as excessive accumulation, illicit transfers, and unlawful use. Their argument rests on the principle that multidimensional problems like these require multidimensional solutions.

Civilian holdings of small arms and their ammunition in countries with weak domestic regulation pose a significant risk of armed violence. According to the Small Arms Survey, there are more than one billion firearms in the world and more than 850 million of these weapons are in civilian hands, compared to more than 130 million firearms in military arsenals, and more than 20 million owned by law enforcement agencies.⁹

The United Nations (UN) Secretary-General has stressed that because of the immense harm that weapons and ammunition can wreak, any government that decides to export them must recognize its weighty international responsibility for every transfer it authorizes.¹⁰ Conversely, a government importing or procuring from national production must ensure that it will use these weapons only to provide for the safety and security of its citizens and that it has the capacity to safeguard all weapons and ammunition in its possession throughout their life cycles.

⁹ Small Arms Survey, *Armed Violence – Social and Economic Costs*, 2017. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/de/armed-violence/social-and-economic-costs.html>.

¹⁰ United Nations Security Council, *Small arms and light weapons*, Report of the Secretary-General, 27 April 2015, S/2015/289.

The International Action Network on Small Arms

Civil society is playing a major role in alerting governments and intergovernmental organizations to the problems stemming from inadequately managed weapons and ammunition, and in proposing solutions. Formed in 1997, the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) is the global movement against gun violence, composed of hundreds of member organizations from across the world. It represents an array of stakeholders from non-governmental organizations, academia, think tanks, activist groups, and faith-based organizations, as well as survivors of gun violence. IANSA's thematic sub-networks include the IANSA Women's Network, the IANSA Public Health Network led by International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), and the IANSA Survivors' Network led by Transitions Foundation in Guatemala. Many IANSA members also participate in other global movements focused on human security topics such as landmines, child soldiers, nuclear weapons, and gender-based violence.

IANSA works by sharing knowledge about best practices, building coalitions for fact-based advocacy, and amplifying the voices of the individuals, families, and communities directly affected by small arms and light weapons. Most IANSA members are not technical specialists on weapons, although some do high-grade research on arms. They are mainly organizations and individuals working in human rights, justice, public health, humanitarian aid, development, and peace, who have joined IANSA because the flood of guns and violence is impeding their regular work. They understand the grave consequences illicit weapons are having on communities and people's livelihoods. Through IANSA, they learn about solutions being pursued at national, regional, and international levels.

IANSA promotes measures to reduce gun violence by raising awareness among policymakers and the public about the global threat to human rights and human security caused by the uncontrolled spread and abuse of small arms and light weapons. IANSA also promotes civil society efforts in policy