
AdvocacyNet
News Bulletin 160
July 23, 2008

WOMEN ADVOCATES PLACE GENDER AND GUNS ON THE UN'S AGENDA



New York: Advocates for women's rights have succeeded in placing violence against women at the heart of a major United Nations initiative to regulate the global small arms trade.

The initiative was launched in 2001, and reviewed last week at the Third Biennial Meeting of States (BMS), held at UN headquarters in New York. After intense lobbying by advocates, gender was mentioned by several governments. In addition, the final outcome document refers to both gender and civilian possession of weapons.

Advocates hope that this will open the door to the inclusion of other concerns, particularly armed domestic violence. Guns in the home take a terrible toll on the lives of women.

"I think that we made a small inroad regarding the inclusion of gender, and I think that our presence ensured that women are not forgotten," said Sarah Masters, Coordinator of the Women's Network for the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), a powerful voice for mitigating the impact of gun violence worldwide.

The IANSA Women's Network, a strategic partner of The Advocacy Project (AP), brought more than 15 of its members to the BMS. During interviews with AP intern

Jessie Schwartz, the women talked about the proliferation of guns in their countries, and its impact on women.

According to Rita Santos, from the Economic and Social Council in Portugal, men keep guns at home for hunting – and use this to “intimidate” their partners. Mirjana Dokmanovic, a leading researcher from Serbia, described a “culture of guns” in post-war Serbia.

In the Middle East, guns are increasingly used by family members against women in honor killings. In Brazil and Jamaica, many women gravitate toward gun-toting men for a sense of protection.

Alba Zelaya, director of women’s group Cemujer in El Salvador, said that 99 women have been killed so far this year in her country, and that more than 80 percent died from gun violence.

The reasons differ, but the result is the same: Worldwide, women are about 12 times more likely to die from domestic violence when a gun is the home.

Such statistics were widely aired by the IANSA members at last week’s UN meeting. Marie Claire Faray Kele from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) gave a formal presentation to delegates on guns and domestic violence, and the network held a side event on small arms in the home. Network members also put together a “clothesline” display of traditional clothing with messages from women affected by guns.

The UN has been working for seven years to regulate firearms worldwide, based on a Program of Action (PoA) developed in 2001. Women were only mentioned in one sentence in the original document, according to Ms. Masters.

This year, the Women’s Network released a statement calling on states to include gender data in their national reports on the plan, support research, and push for laws to prevent armed domestic violence. At present, only four countries – Australia, Canada, South Africa, and Trinidad and Tobago – have harmonized domestic violence and firearms laws.

Ms Masters said the Women’s Network hopes to develop a program focusing on armed domestic violence, building on the connections made at the UN.

“The challenges are that women’s issues and gender issues should not be sidelined or seen as an ‘additional’ or ‘optional’ extra, which is often the feeling that some of us get when we are at such meetings,” she said.

- Read the BMS [2008 Outcome Document](#).
- Read the [Women’s Network statement](#).
- Learn more about the [IANSA Women’s Network](#).