



AP Volunteer Blasts Gun Violence Against Women at UN Session

New York, March 15, 2010: A volunteer of the Advocacy Project (AP) has used the setting of a major UN meeting to denounce the horrific damage caused by gun violence against women and girls within families.

Speaking before diplomats at a panel event during the UN Commission on the Status of Women last week, [Rebecca Gerome](#), 23, described her work as a peace fellow last summer with the Women's Peace Collective in the Colombian city of Cali:

"Somewhere in Colombia, a girl is hiding. Somewhere in Colombia, a woman is silently enduring her husband's beatings. Somewhere in Colombia, an adolescent girl is being raped in front of her community. Somewhere in Colombia, a woman's tears are being silenced. What do all these stories have in common? One word. Guns."

Ms Gerome was one of seven peace fellows recruited last year by AP and the [Women's Network of the International Action Network on Small Arms \(IANSA\)](#). The two organizations are supporting an international campaign to take guns away from abusers with a history of domestic violence. Ms Gerome has remained involved since returning from Colombia and joined IANSA's delegation to the UN Commission.

Last week's panel was organized by the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, the Mission of Norway to the UN, and the IANSA Women's Network to review the impact of armed violence on women and girls. As well as Colombia, it featured experts from DRC, Guyana, and three children from New York City who are active in school projects against guns. The panel also showed two AP videos, one by Ms Gerome on Colombia, and the other by Peace Fellow [Walter James](#), on sexual violence in DRC.

IANSA argues that gun violence in the home is a threat to human security, particularly of women and girls, and Ms Gerome explained how the culture of "machista" in Colombia combines with the easy availability of guns to create a crisis that can no longer be ignored. She stated, "between 60 and 70 percent of Colombian women have suffered some form of sexual, physical, emotional or political violence in their lives. In 2008 only there were 21,000 victims of sexual violence, many at gunpoint. 16,000 were children. The numbers are astonishing."

The international campaign on armed domestic violence was launched in 32 countries last summer. IANSA has since [analysed data from seven countries](#) and found "a worrying

pattern in which guns are routinely used to threaten, intimidate and facilitate violence against women in the home."

Advocates are also on the defensive in Canada, which maintains a gun registry and is one of only four governments to link guns and domestic violence in its legislation. The Canadian government has proposed to eliminate the registration of shot guns and rifles, even though firearm-related spousal homicides fell by nearly 50% in a 9-year period after the registry was introduced. The police use the registry around 15,000 times a day.

Peace Fellow [Elizabeth Mandelman](#) worked with Canadian peace activists last summer and used her blogs to defend the registry. She received 452 comments, mostly from Canadian "Gun Nutz" who denounced her to her university Dean, accused her of terrorism, and asked members to inundate her Facebook page with negative comments.

In spite of such intimidation, there are signs of progress in less secure societies. In Colombia, activists collected 15,000 signatures in support of the campaign last November. In Namibia, where Peace Fellow [Johanna Wilkie](#) worked with a women's group, Breaking the Wall of Silence, the government pledged to tighten firearm registration during a February 11 debate on defense. Namibia's Deputy Prime Minister, Dr Libertina Amathila, linked the decision to reports of women being shot by their boyfriends or husbands.

Other IANSA country partners are also making more use of UN procedures. In August 2009, the Argentinian Association for Public Policy (which also took a Peace Fellow) [submitted questions about Argentina's firearms policy](#) to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The same month, IANSA members from Argentina, Colombia, Namibia and Portugal [submitted communications](#) to the UN Commission on the Status of Women, showing how armed domestic violence affects women's human rights.

- For more information contact [Sarah Masters](#)
- [Read the statements.](#)
- Watch [Rebecca's Colombia film.](#)
- Watch the [DRC video on sexual violence by Walter James](#)