A Programme of Action to Address the Human Cost of Small Arms and Light Weapons

Inter-Agency Standing Committee
Addressing the Human Costs of Small Arms and Light Weapons: a Programme of Action

The uncontrolled trade in small arms and light weapons is a matter of life and death to people around the world. The failure to control this trade effectively has serious humanitarian consequences as the resulting widespread use of these weapons causes immense human suffering. It is estimated that each year several hundred thousand people are killed by small arms, and countless more sustain non-fatal injuries leading in many instances to severe and chronic disabilities.

The proliferation of small arms is a major problem for humanitarian and development agencies working to meet the needs of the people who live in these shattered communities. So devastating is the impact of these weapons, they are now considered one of the major obstacles to achieving sustainable human development. The proliferation and use of small arms has even reversed the development gains of past decades.

Recent studies commissioned by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) members have highlighted the following results from the proliferation and irresponsible use of small arms and light weapons.

The presence and the use of small arms and light weapons have:

- Caused millions of deaths.
- Produced millions of injuries often leading to permanent disability, thus burdening communities and health systems as a whole.
- Killed and disabled the most vulnerable civilians, in particular children and women, and facilitated the recruitment and use of children as soldiers.
- Resulted in numerous serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.
- Fueled insecurity and have increased the risk of wider violent conflicts.
- Caused massive social disruption, including forced displacement, resulting in reduced access to basic needs.
- Acted as a magnifier of violence, both in conflict and non-conflict situations, generating a culture of violence affecting all social groups, including children and women, who have usually been outside the traditional patterns of conflict.
- Threatened the security of refugees and displaced people and have undermined the civilian and humanitarian nature of camps and settlements.
- Prevented many people from achieving a sustainable livelihood. Farming communities are too scared to tend their fields for fear of falling victim to unpredictable assault by armed groups operating in their area.
- Created a climate where it is impossible to attract investment and conduct business.
- Contributed to the deterioration of the institutions of health and education, producing poor health and educational prospects for the local population.
- Contributed to the destruction of essential infrastructure.
- Exacerbated crime-related violence.
- Have caused the deaths of humanitarian workers and hindered humanitarian access.
A Programme of Action to Address the Human Cost

Small arms and light weapons present an enormous challenge, and the call for change has come from within the communities affected by these arms. Responding to these calls, from Albania to Mali, from Kenya to Cambodia, UN agencies, international and national Non-Governmental Organizations are working with communities and individuals who want to find alternatives to an armed response to their situation.

While primary responsibility for the problem rests with States, our group of humanitarian and development organizations, has committed ourselves to the following actions and will report back to the Review Conference on the progress we have made.

A child stands beside a soldier, holding on to his rifle, on a street in Sarajevo.

UNICEF/ Senad GUBELIC

Country-based Projects

Improving pre-hospital and emergency medical care and surveillance of small arms injuries

For many victims of violence hurt by small arms, access to adequate pre-hospital care and emergency medical treatment decides the difference between life and death, and between survival with or without major disability. Alongside prevention efforts, support for country- and local-level improvement of these treatment services is fundamental to ensuring that victims of small arms injuries are given the best possible chances of survival and reintegration into society.

At the point of treatment the “who, what, when, where and how” of the incident can be recorded, and through sustained registration, the area-specific profile of injuries due to small arms is readily defined. This process is known as violence and injury surveillance, and provides information that is fundamental to the design, targeting and evaluation of prevention programmes.

Examples of what we are doing:
• Development of pre-hospital care guidelines for less-resourced contexts.
• Emergency first aid training for trainers at national level, and for providers at district level, in Angola, Mozambique and Cambodia.
• Establishment of sentinel violence and injury surveillance sites at hospital emergency rooms in Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya and Mozambique.
• Development of guidelines for violence and injury surveillance in less-resourced contexts.
• Provision of expert advice on applying injury surveillance data for the design of prevention programmes in Mozambique.

Members of the IASC pledge themselves to:
• Continue to promote work aimed at saving lives and improving the future prospects of victims of small arms.
• Continue to gather information relating to small arms injuries to create better informed programme responses.

A Programme of Action to Address the Human Cost
A key element towards promoting a safer environment in post-conflict situations is the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants, combined with the collection and destruction of weapons. In our experience, this cannot be done successfully in isolation, but must be part of an overall framework of security, human rights and development.

Members of the IASC pledge themselves to:

- Explore further interventions in post-conflict countries, for example the Great Lakes Region, Tajikistan, Haiti, Peru, the Philippines and Sierra Leone.
- Continue to advocate the importance of DDR programmes and providing support for their implementation.

Examples of what we are doing:

- Creation of a Trust Fund for Support to the Prevention and Reduction of the proliferation of Small Arms to support the development of comprehensive small arms strategies in programme countries.
- Programmes that provide development incentives for arms collection, such as in Niger, Mali and Albania. Strengthening of the security sector, and providing governance support, such as in Honduras and Somalia.
- Provision of expert advice to collect and destroy weapons in the Solomon Islands, Niger and Republic of Congo.
- Provision of skills and job training for ex-combatants and for victims of conflict.

Demobilized soldiers are assisted in starting a new civilian life.

UNHCR / L TAYLOR
Child Soldiers

An estimated 300,000 children are serving as child soldiers around the world. Members of the IASC are already working to demobilize and reintegrate children who have been used in hostilities as combatants, porters, spies, cooks and sex slaves.

Examples of what we are doing:

- Involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo to demobilize children and to prevent recruitment of children.
- In Sierra Leone, creation of a programme to work with 5,400 former child soldiers.

Members of the IASC pledge themselves to:

- Continue to put pressure on armed groups to release children being used in their forces and to stop recruiting children.
- Stand ready to promote the physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of children who have taken part in armed conflicts.

Adolescent boys who are former child soldiers sit on the ground, still holding their weapons, before the start of a demobilization ceremony in a transit camp near the town of Rumbek, capital of the province of Lakes in southern Sudan, after being evacuated by UNICEF from a combat zone in a nearby province.

UNICEF / Stevie MANN

A child playing with a magazine of an AK47 which has not been destroyed.

ICRC / Boris HEGER
Improving security in areas populated by displaced people

It is a well-established principle in international law that governments have primary responsibility for the physical protection of displaced people on their territory, but IASC members are involved where their mandate and expertise allows in improving the security for displaced people.

Examples of what we are doing:
- Deployment and training of special police contingents.
- Building the capacity of local law enforcement authorities to help them maintain the rule of law in refugee populated areas.
- Provision of training on refugee and human rights law to law enforcers.
- Community-based approach to address gender-based violence fuelled by the presence of small arms.

Members of the IASC pledge themselves to:
- Continue to develop customized protection mechanisms through the strengthening of local capacities, complementing and enhancing State’s responsibilities, rather than substituting for it.
- Strengthen cooperation between UNHCR and DPKO to enable a better response to situations where refugee-populated areas have become militarized.
- Pursue the establishment of a standby team of experts (Humanitarian Security Officers) to be deployed at start of crisis to stop armed elements becoming too entrenched amongst the refugees.
Community peace building and education

The first step to enable communities to feel secure enough to surrender weapons is often community-level peace building. Many IASC members through their development and humanitarian work hold a unique position of trust in these communities, enabling them to act as initiators or supporters of dialogue between warring groups. We are also working to counter the culture of violence through peace education in many countries around the world. We are mounting public information and awareness raising programmes to counter the acceptance and daily use of small arms.

Examples of what we are doing:

- Work with women’s groups in Kenya and Mali to assist their efforts to reduce incidents of armed violence in their communities.
- Promotion of confidence building measures, such as a cricket league of mixed teams in Sri Lanka and recreational activities for youth through Millennium Peace Tournaments in Somalia.
- Training of National Police in Haiti to improve civilian security.
- Promotion of the concept of “children as zones of peace” and ‘schools as zones of peace’, to allow children to develop safe from violence.
- Bringing young people in Kosovo and Albania together under the banner ‘Don’t let guns kill our dreams!’

Members of the IASC pledge themselves to:

- Continue to look for opportunities to work with community groups and start new projects to create conditions reducing armed violence.
- Strengthen a culture of peace which questions gun dependency and gun glorification, counters the use of small arms and light weapons and promotes alternatives to violent conflict resolution.
Since small arms are often a significant harmful factor in emerging crisis situations, just being aware of the threat they pose, and being able to deal with them quickly are essential to a successful humanitarian and development response.

Examples of what we are doing:
• Collaboration with NGOs on the research project 'The Impact of Small Arms on Children'.
• Research into the human cost of small arms.
• Initiation of dialogue on small arms and development between donors, NGOs and UN development agencies in Geneva to contribute to building an integrated approach that achieves sustainable solutions to the problem of small arms.
• Support for the Global Survey on Small Arms.
• Development of guidelines for programme officers and field staff faced with small arms issues to identify options and strategies to deal with small arms in pursuit of overall development and humanitarian goals.

Members of the IASC pledge themselves to:
• Work with partners dealing with supply-side issues, advocating for political processes, restraint and other legal measures to counter the illicit trade.
Members of the IASC pledge themselves to:

• Perform population-based surveys to establish the magnitude of deaths and injuries resulting from small arms in order to inform prevention programmes and provide baseline data for the monitoring of intervention effectiveness.

• Undertake further studies in countries and regions where the human cost of small arms has not yet been researched.

• Continue to raise awareness and promote a broad understanding of the humanitarian consequences of small arms.

• Strengthen data collection on the impact of conflict on children, including small arms.

Examples of what we are doing

• Support for the development and implementation of the ECOWAS Moratorium on the Import, Export and Manufacture of Small Arms and Light Weapons, a programme that is building both regional and national institutions to confront the small arms problem.

• Support for the process of the Organization of African Unity leading to the Bamako Declaration.

• Support for the agreed Nairobi Declaration to tackle the issue, including by developing regional mechanisms, to curtail small arms traffic in East Africa.

Building regional responses

The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons does not respect boundaries. National programmes are often inadequate on their own to counter the uncontrolled proliferation of weapons and regional approaches are required.

Members of the IASC pledge themselves to:

• Support regional approaches to the problem, in particular in the Great Lakes Region and in West Africa.

Global impact

Members of the IASC have witnessed the tragic humanitarian and development consequences of the proliferation of small arms throughout the world. Driven by this experience, we have pledged to work to advocate for change both at the national and international level.

Members of the IASC are working to achieve the following:

• Establish small arms as a major humanitarian and development issue demanding urgent action.

• Introduce effective supply-side measures, such as the adoption by States of international criteria on arms transfers.

• Achieve rapid and universal adoption, by governments, of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, establishing 18 years as the minimum age for participation in conflict.

• Respect for the civilian nature of asylum and return of refugees to country of origin in safety and dignity.

• Curbing the demand for small arms by addressing the root causes of the conflict or violence.

• Strengthen a culture of peace which promotes alternatives to violence and arms.

• Compilation of global data on the impact of small arms.
Conclusion

The aspirations outlined in our Programme of Action will be undermined unless accompanied by a new era of responsible management of transfers of small arms and light weapons by all governments gathered at the UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arm and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects.

In recognition of the fact that the proliferation of small arms has become a major humanitarian and development issue, Member States must set their sights higher than the limited agenda they have formulated and take bold steps to reverse the trend in uncontrolled flows and use of arms, as well as make a concerted effort to address the underlying factors fuelling demand.

About the IASC:
The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) was established and is guided in its work by GA resolutions, as well as the IASC Rules and Procedures. The IASC is the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of policy issues relating to humanitarian assistance and for formulating coherent and timely response to major disasters and complex emergencies. GA Resolution A/RES/46/182, adopted on 19 December 1991, established the Standing Committee under the chairmanship of the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) and the membership of the following UN Agencies: FAO, UNICEF, UNDP, UNHCR, WFP, WHO and OCHA.

A standing invitation was made to the ICRC, IFRC, IOM, UNHCHR, RSGIDP, World Bank and the three networks representing Non Governmental Humanitarian Agencies: Inter Action, International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), and the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR) participate in IASC meetings as permanent invitees.

We commend for the consideration of Member States

the following actions:

- The formulation of internationally agreed criteria for arms exports that will exclude the export of small arms and light weapons to areas where there is a risk that they will be used in violation of international human rights and humanitarian law, including the recruitment and use of children as soldiers, to fuel conflict or undermine sustainable development.

- Commitment to address the humanitarian and development needs, that contribute to end-user demand for small arms and light weapons.

- Effective measures to stop the activities of brokers and shipping agents in the illicit trade in small arms, such as an international convention on controlling the brokering and trafficking of arms.

- A strengthened UN embargo system through improved implementation and monitoring procedures.

- More effective end-user controls to stop the diversion of legal exports into illegal channels.

- The creation of violence and injury surveillance systems to improve understanding of the impact of small arms and to evaluate the effects of preventative measures.