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Gender Equality Small Arms Control – Towards Bullet Proof Inclusion

Gender Equality Network for Small Arms Control (GENSAC)

Summary of

Context

The two day conference, convened by the **German Federal Foreign Office** in collaboration with the **Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies** at New York University’s Center on International Cooperation, brought together more than 80 experts, practitioners, representatives of the security sector, academics, and diplomats working on the issue of arms control, conflict prevention, gender, and development from countries in Africa, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

The aim of the discussion was to **facilitate knowledge exchange of best practice from regional small arms control efforts, and build practical, political, and cross-regional momentum to strengthen the inclusion of a gender lens within arms control efforts and debates**. It was also an opportunity to launch the [Pathfinders’ Action Paper](#) that outlines seven practical strategies to achieve this during the [UN’s Decade of Action on the Sustainable Development Goals](#) and at a time where we celebrate other important anniversaries in 2020.*

The conference follows Germany’s year-long engagement as a member of the Pathfinders, during which they have placed gender and small arms control at the heart of efforts to implement the SDG targets for violence prevention, actively linking SDG5 and SDG16. The conference was informed by a series of consultations and exchanges in 2019 on how to best harness women’s leadership in arms control and encourage cross-regional best practice exchanges (linking African policymakers and practitioners to successful models in the West Balkans).

Highlights

Day 1 – Closed Network Meeting

The metaphor of a **bridge** was used throughout the first day in the discussions that took place. Participants were encouraged to think of ways to bridge the gaps between the 2030 Agenda, the Women Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, and the disarmament agenda. Moreover, it emphasized the necessity to create synergies among the cross-cutting issues and facilitated cross-regional exchange of best practice as participants contributed to workshops of their “home” regions as well as one other region in small interactive sessions.

* In 2020, the UN celebrates its 75th anniversary; we will mark the 25th anniversary of the “the most progressive blueprint ever for advancing women’s rights” - the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; and also the 20th anniversary of UNSC Resolution 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

Participants in the workshops discussed meaningful inclusion across regions:

Latin America and the Caribbean

- Reaffirmed the links between gender equality and security, noting one cannot be more important than the other and that often security follows when gender equality leads. Yet, also acknowledging that, in many regions of the world, the sequencing is the opposite, prioritizing security.
- Underlined the precarious position many women find themselves in, in conflict situations, as well as following the conclusion of fighting when men return home with weapons; the parallels with other regions such as Africa were emphasized where after conflicts, weapons freely circulate across the continent.
- Discussed the importance of changing laws to tackle possession of firearms, and changing attitudes around the image of masculinity; the idea of banning security personnel from taking arms home and possession for those who have a criminal record was highlighted in multiple interventions.
- Raised questions about arms acquisition, trade, import, and licensing since many weapons used to commit femicides are illegal.
- Sounded the alarm on the authoritarian turn many governments in the region have taken, which in turn led to a change of policies on arms possession and their liberalization.
- Shared insights into a project which incorporates gender perspective in forensics research, that among other things enables police to identify femicides, highlighting the nuances in violence against victims.
- Emphasized that, at times, international treaties and conventions on human rights, including women's rights, can put pressure on governments to include a gender perspective as part of the agenda.

Western Balkans

- Shared statistics that men commit a majority of crimes using arms, while women who rarely use them are ten times more likely to be a victim in the region; also noted that some countries in the region lack appropriate gender-based violence protection laws and that domestic violence is often not reported or severely underreported.
- Acknowledged that progress towards a gender responsive small arms control policy in the region is a result of the prolonged investments, ongoing cooperation that exists among experts, and bottom-up organized, comprehensive research on gender and small arms conducted in 2016 that serves as a baseline for all interventions, and most recently the regional [Roadmap 2024](#) which has high-level political buy-in.
- Recognized that building institutional capacity for gender equal small arms control takes programs such as gender coaches (peer-to-peer learning), training for SALW commissions, supporting local institutions, and increasing the knowledge and participation of women in small arms control.

- Highlighted specific examples of establishing vibrant and active networks of women police officers in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), whose creation is possible in part due to WPS National Action Plans, and which have enabled a huge shift in women's involvement in law enforcement and in responses to gender-based violence. However, they have yet to see women reaching higher ranks and breaking the glass ceiling.
- Detailed the ongoing work with ministries of defense across the region to raise awareness of gender responsive work and build up a network of gender military coaches from these institutions who were trained to become gender advocates.
- Called for a follow up to the cross-regional training that took place between West Africa and Western Balkans experts, deployment of experts to share experiences across regions, and for international donors to address gender in the projects they are funding.

West and East Africa

- Called for addressing the full range of arms control measures throughout their life cycle.
- Highlighted efforts in Sierra Leone and Guinea to tackle local manufacturing of arms in close collaboration with the women's group that helps with faster detection of ammunition and explosives, and the work women did in Mali to establish contact and negotiate with armed groups and track down explosives and weapons.
- Presented best practice from Somalia where the active participation of women has led to a higher rate of defection from Al-Shahab groups.
- Highlighted the important role women-led civil society organizations played in the creation of the ECOWAS Moratorium on Small Arms in West Africa, as well as in the resulting ECOWAS Convention, and reported that ECOWAS is currently developing a regional strategy on Gender and SALW-control.
- Emphasized various regional and African Union instruments, including the efforts of the Silencing the Guns initiative that set a good example and high standard for gender responsive arms control, as well as various instances in which women have taken a proactive role in arms control – formally through the governmental role or informally through civil society.
- Recognized that too often governments attempt to outsource gender and arms control efforts to CSOs, lack of gender responsive approaches in security and defense institutions and general skepticism towards it, and, at times, international donors' indifference to gender issues.
- Shared frustrations with traditional gender roles and called for a mentality and mindset shift on arms control being men's issues.

In the afternoon sessions on the cross-cutting issues, participants discussed:

Bridging the WPS – SALW Gap

- Underlined that WPS National Action Plans (NAPs) are an essential link between the WPS and SALW agendas, and that their implementation is crucial.

- Discussed the highlights from the German NAP and emphasized the role GENSAC can play in contributing recommendations to the new NAP covering the period from 2021-24, as well as in developing new language on women's role in disarmament and arms control.
- Shared experiences from Germany's engagement on the UN Security Council during which there was a concerted effort to invite female briefs, organize engagement on WPS in specific country situations, and WPS language mainstreamed in UNSC resolutions.
- Agreed that momentum in the lead up to the 20th anniversary must be seized and welcomed Germany's commitments to call on its embassies to support WPS projects.

Developing Partnerships and Leveraging Networks

- Called for further mapping of actors involved in gender responsive small arms control and identification of partnership gaps that might exist.
- Discussed the importance of political will, and high-level government champions, in advancing specific commitments and a bold agenda on gender equal arms control.
- Underlined the importance of adequate protection mechanisms of women's CSOs as they advocate for stronger arms control.
- Highlighted the importance of regional women's peace and security forums that bring together women from government and civil society in some regions of the world, but also the challenges with maintaining the political will to advance the work.

Increasing the Evidence Base

- Raised questions about what we understand to be evidence, and what its use will be; also, in cases where data is absent, how we can tell the difference between anecdotal and proven solutions.
- Acknowledged there is limited data on arms control in connection to gender, especially in the Latin American region, while some countries lack capacity to collect data and have to rely on NGOs.
- Noted that big achievements were made in the Western Balkans to highlight the gaps and shortcomings in national legislation. In addition, in other parts of the world, the data gaps have been partly overcome by working with hospitals to establish a connection between gun victims, guns, and domestic violence.
- Expressed concern that in many instances, political powers disregard evidence and facts, and called for investment in communication of best practice evidence and solutions.
- Called for best practice for data collection, especially innovative ways of collecting data via social media, and ethical standards for their use.

Day 2 – High-level Network Meeting

Opening Statements

The high-level segment of the conference was opened by **Susanne Baumman**, Federal Government Commissioner for Disarmament and Arms Control and Director-General for International Order, the United Nations and Arms Control, who underlined the German Government’s vision to place gender perspective front and center in all regional and political processes of small arms control, and gave concrete commitments to support GENSAC by:

- Supporting active participation of women and men gender champions in relevant disarmament and conflict prevention policy spaces.
- Convening an annual GENSAC conference in Berlin with a goal of highlighting gaps, innovation, and new learnings in gender responsive arms control, and encouraging cross-regional exchange and networking.

Renata Dwan, Director of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), delivered the keynote address reminding participants that at the core of many forms of violence lies racism and toxic masculinity. These problems, she pointed out, are not reserved for “fragile” or conflict affected countries, but manifest themselves across the world. To understand and address it, one has to confront issues of gender and armament, since gender does not equal women. On the contrary, she added “it is about looking at how being a woman or a man shape the way we live – and die.”

Dwan suggested very practical ideas for how GENSAC and other initiatives can contribute to advancing more equal and more effective small arms control by:

- Increasing and promoting participation of women in small arms control policy development and decision making; including by nurturing women’s participation, self-awareness, training opportunities, promotion practices, encouragement, and confidence building to speak up and engage.
- Changing the substance of disarmament and arms control discourse, by tackling issues of masculinity, collecting disaggregated data, and relying on gender analysis to understand the data to increase the understanding of the secondary effects of small arms, and supporting the exchange of best practice on gender mainstreaming.
- Influencing the multilateral arms control policy process, which UNIDIR has led the way on by educating policymakers and finding ways to bring gender expertise to the forefront of discussions and into different national delegations.

Dwan concluded her remarks by pointing out that national action, and regional and international policy, is key to small arms control and that networks can complement these efforts, while also being spaces for support, peer-exchange, and learning.

Liv Tørres, Director of Pathfinders, in collaboration with **Fairlie Chappuis**, a Pathfinders consultant, tasked with developing the [Action Paper](#), introduced the key findings of the paper which outlines seven strategies for more gender responsive small arms control. The Action Paper, Chappuis noted, is a work in progress and a call to action to those gathered.

In the open discussion, representatives from **UNODC**, and the governments of **Canada, Switzerland, and Namibia** expressed their support for GENSAC and shared their national priorities in relation to small arms control and gender. They pointed out that GENSAC has huge potential to bring evidence to the forefront, drive a change of the narrative, and bring knowledge to stakeholders while creating access to policy spaces for them.

Report Back and Discussions

After hearing the main takeaways from the discussions in each regional group during the working day of the conferences, learning about specific projects to amplify women's leadership in small arms control, and hearing about Germany's policy to arms export control, the following threads emerged in the discussions:

- The regions represented were each at different points of addressing the issues of small arms and gender, creating space for constructive exchanges on how to use best practice from the different regions and adapt them to the specific context.
- There is a power of mobilization among networks (of civil society, government officials, experts) as well as representatives of various sectors (government, international organizations, security sector, and civil society organizations) to advocate for gender responsive small arms control policies, and their reliance on international human rights instruments to affect positive change at the national level.
- Vast importance should be placed on training and education, in particular for security and defense forces in gender responsive small arms control to recognize femicide and better understand the effect guns have on the fabric of society.
- There is a need to rely on the existing networks and knowledge in place, as well as national, regional, and broader international efforts.
- There is an urgent need for reliable data that will inform policies, projects, research, and programming, as well as innovative means of advocacy through personal stories that will build political will.

Two projects supported by Germany with the aim of amplifying gendered knowledge and expertise on small arms and disarmament more broadly were shared with participants, as examples of successful projects:

- The Center for Feminist Foreign Policy's [WoX Network](#) is an international network of female experts on foreign policy and security issues, which allows women to register their skills and expertise in order to serve as a reference point and resource for knowledge and policy consultations as well as experts on panels. The online portal features more than 450 women with diverse skillsets, including in small arms control.
- The UNODA and OSCE's [Scholarship for Peace and Security Training](#) which supports young professionals, in particular women, in the male-dominated security sector and disarmament efforts. The program, in its third year, promotes knowledge, awareness, self-confidence, motivation, and building partnerships for participants' careers in the security sector.

Closing and Reflections

Izumi Nakamitsu, United Nations Under-Secretary-General of Disarmament Affairs, addressed the conference attendees via a [video message](#). She saluted the organizers and participants, and highlighted that GENSAC and its members will play a critical role in translating national commitments on gender and small arms control into practice. Nakamitsu praised the integrated global platform in the making for aiming to foster regular exchanges on regional and national best practices, for bridging the gaps among those working on small arms control, gender-based violence, women peace and security, and 2030 Agenda implementation, and for pooling expertise among practitioners.

The host, represented by **Rüdiger Bohn**, Deputy Federal Government Commissioner for Disarmament and Arms Control and Deputy Director-General for International Order, the United Nations and Arms Control, closed the conference by observing how far the allies around the table have come in uniting for more gender equal arms control – from establishing women’s police networks in Bosnia and Herzegovina, to leading small arms and light weapons commissions, to piloting gender sensitive criminal investigations on the use of firearms.

Looking forward, Bohn set out a challenge to GENSAC members to:

1. Share their work and best practice on an interactive [GENSAC platform](#) currently under development.
2. Use GENSAC as “network of networks” which serves as a resource on technical expertise and guidance as well as a platform for information exchange and peer support.
3. Connect across continents by building bridges among regions represented through exchanges, convenings, and sharing of knowledge.

“Let us unite forces and work together towards bulletproof inclusion”