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# Gender Equal Arms Control: Leveraging the 2030 Agenda to Promote Peace

## Importance of Linking SDG 5 and SDG 6 for Efficient Regional Small Arms and Light Weapons Control

1:30pm, 12 July, 2019; The Permanent Mission of Germany

### Summary of Discussions

The High-level Political Forum (HLPF) side event brought together more than 80 participants in discussion about the importance of linking SDG 5 and SDG 6 for efficient regional small arms and light weapons control, focusing on engaging women in arms control in order to promote peace. The event was organized by the Governments of Germany and Namibia, the Permanent Observer Mission of the African Union to the UN, the Group of Friends of the African Women Leaders Network (AWLN) to the UN; chaired by the Permanent Mission of Ghana; and vice-chaired by the Permanent Mission of Germany and the NYU Center on International Cooperation Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies.

The opening remarks were delivered by representative from the Mission of Germany to the UN, and panelists included representatives from Mission of Ghana to the UN, African Women Leaders Network (AWLN), UN Office of Disarmament Affairs, and the Nigerian civil society. In the audience were also women civil society representatives from Kenya, Cameroon, and South Africa, as well as a representative from the UNDP SEESAC.

#### Highlights from discussion:

- It is imperative to increase women's participation in disarmament and arms control efforts to sustain peace and combat the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons (SALW); this can be achieved by harnessing the capacity of women in these endeavors;
- Despite existing good practices, global patterns show that women remain underrepresented in discussions on arms control;
- Women need to be seen as agents of change and who should play an instrumental role in the design of arms control and disarmament policies;
- There is a need for cross regional exchange of best-practices and knowledge in order to have effective SALW control with gender equal lens;
- The international community needs to recognize the humanitarian and socioeconomic consequences of the use of small arms and light weapons;

**Ms. Karin Goebel**, Head of the Economic Department at the Permanent Mission of Germany to the UN, welcomed the event participants and reiterated that illicit trafficking in and proliferation of SALWs remain a key obstacle to achieving sustainable development and reducing a number of violent deaths. As a result, Germany together with France has supported a successful regional SALW initiative in the Balkans, and is keen to further contribute to the efforts of the AU to “silence the guns” in Africa. Goebel added that women must play an essential role in these efforts, and that gender equal arms control agenda must take priority. Consequently, she announced the formation of a cross-regional network for gender equal arms control to support the ongoing efforts by AU, AWLN, and further amplify the work conducted in the lead up to this HLPF event.

**H.E. Ambassador Martha Pobee**, Permanent Representative of Ghana to the UN and co-chair of the Group of Friends of the African Women Leaders Network to the UN, opened the discussion advising the audience on the valuable contributions of women to peace and security. She mentioned that women make up less than 5% of the senior leadership of law and justice institutions in Africa and that it is vital for increased women representation in these sectors. In addition, she expressed that the UN Program of Action (PoA) on SALW and the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) should be linked more firmly to the 2030 Agenda. Amb. Pobee acknowledged the fact that women need to be seen as agents for change and should be properly equipped to do so. She further explained that we must listen to women and not simply replicate ideologies. She concluded that in order to have effective implementation of SDGs it is necessary to close the gap between gender and security, ultimately breaking the silos that exist between these two fields.

**Ms. Mary Soliman**, Chief of the Regional Disarmament Branch for the UN Office of Disarmament Affairs, stated that gender equality is not only a human right but an excellent tool for accelerating equal rights. Soliman said that armed violence aggravates poverty, inhibits access to social services, and diverts energy and resources away from Sustainable Development Goals. She elucidated that SDG 5 is central to all SDG achievements and strengthening the roles of women will accelerate progress in disarmament and arms control. She added that we should work together to achieve the ambitious goals framework spelled out in the Agenda and ensure that women are given a meaningful opportunity to participate in arms control efforts.

**Ms. Verlaine-Diane Soobroydoo**, Policy Advisor on WPS at the Permanent Mission of the African Union to the UN and AWLN Network Coordinator, said that the African Union recognizes the WPS agenda as guiding the effort to maintain more peaceful and sustainable societies. She continued by saying women should be at all stages of arms control, mediation, conflict prevention and resolution, which would shift the current balance of power. She added that too often women are regarded as victims and are allowed only speak up regarding women’s issues. Instead, she suggested, women should be involved in arms control with their voices front and center, and lead in conflict prevention. The AU initiative to “Silence the Guns by 2020” is an instrument which can ultimately empower women to achieve this goal, said Soobroydoo. In conclusion, she stated that we have all the instruments and commitments to drive women’s leadership forward, and that it is time to get to action.

**Ms. Josephine Habba**, President of West Africa Action Network on Small Arms, Nigeria Chapter (WAANSA) and member of the AWLN, began her remarks with a metaphor by comparing women to staircases. She said that too often women are seen only as an “emergency exist,” i.e. someone to rely on in case of crisis, rather than someone who is more like an “elevator” and can be relied upon constantly. She added that we must unpack the term “partnership” and correctly monitor what people say in order to produce better results when speaking of women’s engagement in SALW discussions. Habba explained that it is necessary to first identify the women who should be brought to the table and acknowledge the work they already know how to do, regardless of their educational level. She went on to say that there is much space to support the SALW prevention civil society, especially women. She finished with a quote: “nothing is for us, without us. Let’s go to the table and plan together.”

In the **Q&A period** moderated by **Sarah Cliffe**, Director of NYU Center on International Cooperation, questions were raised regarding the best practices for the implementation of the existing documents; instruments needed for implementation such as capacity and resources; and ways for women to receive proper training and information. Participants also questioned how to overcome the obstacles for women's participation in leadership when women are generally excluded at higher levels, and how women can be seen as an agent of change and not just victims. In addition, they asked about the gap that exists between SDG 5 and SDG 6 and posited that this is a cultural issue which is often left unaddressed. Participants also questioned the necessary steps to build women's overall capacity and how to increase their confidence levels in order to break down cultural barriers. Lastly, participants asked how we can address these issues and move the conversation beyond New York.

Panelists agreed that among the first steps to achieve this is to first recognize the inputs women have made in SALW discussion. They acknowledged that we have accumulated commitments and "good words," but we need to change the ways processes are implemented to improve the situation. **Cliffe** concluded the discussion by noting that in order to amplify partnerships and alliances towards reaching gender equal arms control it is necessary to support the development of a cross-regional network for gender equal arms control.

[Link to Photos](#)

## Annex – Welcome Dinner and Informal Exchange

The HLPF side event was preceded by an intimate dinner and informal exchange among the 20 participants, including the female arms control leaders from Cameroon, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, representatives from the German Federal Foreign Office, New York and Geneva based civil society groups, AWLN, UNDP SEESAC, and NYU CIC Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies. Interactive exchange allowed for a dynamic brainstorm about the shape of the possible network to elevate the voices of women in disarmament and arms control. There was broad agreement that this new network must be a dynamic movement focused on changing mindsets and rendering results. In addition, it needs to act as a connector that links the civil society to the governments and institutions. In addition, it was suggested that among its priorities should be findings the ways to change the institutional settings for women's involvement in SALW debates, and focus on SALW issues relevant to border regions. The participants were in broad agreement that it is an opportune moment to create a new network, ahead of the SDG Summit which is focused on acceleration commitments to achieve the SDGs and at the time when there is more attention paid to gender mainstreaming in disarmament.