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IANSA Women's Statement on the Illicit Trade of Small Arms and Light Weapons Women's Caucus, United Nations Conference on Small Arms, 2001

Distinguished Members of the Third Preparatory Committee leading to the Conference on the Illicit Trade of Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects

1. The participants of the IANSA Women's Caucus and the signatories of this statement appreciate the opportunity to address the Member States of the Third Preparatory Committee towards the UN Conference on Illicit Trade of Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. The statement addresses global, regional and local dimensions of small arms proliferation and diffusion, especially the impact of small arms proliferation on the human rights of women, the relationships between gender, violence and small arms proliferation as well as the expectations of civil society towards the upcoming UN Conference.

2. With the demise of a bipolar world system, the pattern of violent conflict and arms transfers has

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significantly changed. UN studies estimate that around 300 manufacturers in over 70 countries are producing small arms and light weapons. While a significant number of these weapons end up in the hands of state forces, a large number are found in the hands of irregular armies, communal factions, crime and drug syndicates, as well as individuals.

3. An overwhelming majority of conflicts are fought with small arms and light weapons: Of the forty-nine regional conflicts waged since 1990, small arms and light weapons have been the weapons of choice in forty-six. Small arms kill almost as many people in countries which are not at war: In post-conflict situations interpersonal violence replaces violence between warring factions if weapons remain in circulation and in many other countries small arms figure prominently in criminal violence, domestic violence, suicides and accidents. An estimated 500,000 to 700,000 lives each year are claimed by the use of these weapons, this is an average of 1,700 deaths per day or one person dying every minute. Studies have shown that many primary victims are non-combatants and civilians, out of which a large number are women and children.

4. Even though the availability of small arms and light weapons is not the root cause of armed conflicts, the easy and cheap accessibility of these weapons, facilitates the transformation of social and political conflicts into violent ones. The easy availability of small arms

during and after a conflict is responsible for the militarisation and the masculinisation of society where guns become a symbol of male power and normalise the violent resolution of a conflict. In times of "peace" high levels of violent crimes, domestic assault, sexual violence, suicides and firearms accidents are recorded due to the ready availability of these weapons - legally or illegally possessed.

5. Studies in post-conflict societies have shown that women's perception of security differs considerably to men's: Women experience the presence of small arms in the household as threatening while many men feel more secure in the presence of a weapon. Security goes beyond its military meaning and has to be seen not only in its human dimensions as the safety of women, men and children from both violent and non violent threats but also in its gender dimensions: Women are mostly the victims of the use of small arms while men are the major users of small arms and perpetrators of violence. Women's understanding of security also focus on a different definition of power which entails a conception of political power as rooted in society rather than in its leaders.

6. While there is an increasing number of women participating in armed conflicts as combatants, most of which are members of armed liberation movements, their experiences in war and post war situations are different from men and they are less involved in direct combat. During war,

they are not exempt from sexual violence and harassment under the gun and, in the aftermath of war and the process of reconstruction their needs as former combatants are rarely addressed.

7. Women are particularly affected by the wide availability and use of small arms in times of war and 'peace': Even though women are increasingly participating as combatants in armed conflicts, they still remain the primary victims in such situations as statistics have shown, civilian women have a higher death rate than soldiers in war. Women's experiences in armed conflicts are markedly different to that of men's. Women are strategic targets due to their role as biological, cultural and social reproducers of their societies. Women are subjected to gender-based violence, particularly rape, sexual abuse, economic and physical violence at the hands of power wielded through a hand gun or AK-47.

8. In times of 'peace', small arms are increasingly perceived as a means to provide security and safety. The prevailing culture of violence which legitimates the use of small arms in the domestic sphere allows individuals to access and use small arms to resolve private conflicts. Women are specifically suffering from this culture of violence due to their unequal position in society and within the family. Because of the uncontrolled use of firearms, the number of deaths within the family is steadily increasing. Research consistently reveals that globally, whether in times of peace

or in times of war, women are most likely to die in the hands of men and their intimate partners, while men are more likely to die in the hands of other men. It is a fact that the overwhelming majority of women that are murdered in times of peace, are killed by their partners.

9. A secondary effect of the use of small arms and light weapons in a conflict situation is the large number of refugees and internally displaced persons resulting from the violence. Women and children constitute the majority of these displaced populations and their special needs have to be taken into account. Once outside the actual conflict area women and children are still confronted with potential violence and the paradoxical threat and protection offered by the use of small arms by the controlling forces of particular territory, within the camps, international aid workers and peacekeepers or even in the private sphere.

10. Manufacturers of small arms are increasingly targeting women as potential users of small arms, capitalizing on their need for safety from men to sell weapons. The benefits for the private sector and the shadow economies in primary commodities in the licit and illicit trade of these weapons in no way justify the humanitarian, health-related, and developmental costs of violence deriving from the use of small arms.

11. The process of economic globalization, the ongoing systematic impoverishment of countries in the Global South and the erosion of

human security, not only facilitates small arms proliferation, but also weakens the influence of the state to adequately control and regulate the supply and demand of small arms and light weapons. Economic disparities between and within countries are creating conditions in which weapons are considered the only solution to secure a livelihood. The demand in small arms is in this way directly and indirectly encouraged, especially in urban communities. Women, it has been consistently revealed, carry the major burden of these economic inequalities in attempting to secure the economic survival for their family members.

12. Solutions to the complex and interwoven problem of small arms and light weapons proliferation need to acknowledge that the reduction in availability of these arms require a reduction in the demand for these weapons, which in turn requires a significant or substantive social and economic transformation of society. Women's equal participation and full involvement in these efforts are crucial and can only be secured if they have equal access to all decision-making processes in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms on issues of peace, security, and disarmament.

13. In a momentous decision last year, the UN Security Council recognized the important role of women in the prevention, resolution, and management of conflicts, as well as in peacebuilding

in passing resolution 1325. Women are effective actors in peace negotiations and their contributions to achieve positive peace, including the respect for human rights, equitable and sustainable development, inter-cultural understanding and substantive equality between women and men, have been recognised on paper. The removal of all obstacles to the participation of women is an imperative and local women's peace initiatives and indigenous processes to conflict resolution and their full involvement in the implementation mechanisms of peace agreements have to be supported. Women are not only skilled negotiators, but they are also effective mobilisers in their communities. Women are significant leaders in gun-control coalitions throughout the world and also play a crucial role in weapons collection programmes in post-conflict countries.

14. Conflict prevention, whether in the international, national, local or domestic sphere, requires the limitation and control of the production, trade and availability of small arms and light weapons. There needs to be a similar regime, as with other complex weapons systems, to establish principles and norms regarding the use and trade of these lethal weapons. As Kofi Annan has observed, small arms and light weapons are indeed "weapons of mass destruction" and we need to find sustainable solutions to this global crisis.

15. The participants of IANSA Women's Caucus and the signatories of this

statement urge the Member States of the Third Preparatory Committee to the UN Conference on the Illicit Trade of Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects to consider the following issues:

16. The participants of IANSA Women's Caucus and the (XX number) signatories of this statement call upon the Member States of the Third Preparatory Committee to the UN Conference on the Illicit Trade of Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspect to reach consensus on a Program of Action which supports local and regional responses to small arms proliferation within a substantive framework of international cooperation and commitment. We urge Member States to support the efforts of many UN agencies and NGOs all over the world who work to find sustainable solutions to this crisis with innovations such as weapons collection programs which benefit entire communities and the symbolic and practical relief of weapons destruction.

17. Because many illicit transfers originate as legal sales, IANSA Women's Caucus and the (XX number) of signatories of this statement believes it is vital that the conference take steps to control legal transfers of small arms and light weapons. Many weapons in the illicit market originate as civilian-owned weapons. Therefore, we urge Member States to take measures on civilian possession of small arms and light weapons and highlight these measures as an essential part of the Action Plan.

18. We urge States to

focus on the diversity of people affected by the production, trade and misuse of small arms - families of all descriptions; those in occupations such as teachers and aid workers; children playing in school yards and those who are soldiers; women who are victims of domestic, sexual and cultural violence; men who are combatants of all kinds and in high risk occupations such as police forces. We urge States to bear in mind the dimensions of the crisis, crippling public health, sustainable peace building, humanitarian intervention and undermining arms control, urban harmony and human rights. This crisis affects all of our security in one way or another and we need to act together to address the issue.

19. The multiplicity of regional agreements and treaties provides fertile ground for the Third Preparatory Committee to draw inspiration and established commitment. These agreements set out multiple approaches to this complex and demanding problem, we urge Member States to ensure that the Program of Action resulting from the July Conference contains the strengths and vision of many of these regional agreements and consolidates these efforts.

20. NGO representatives from all over the world are in New York to bring their experiences to the UN, to share their visions about practical ways to build peace, create cultures of non-violence and economic and political justice for all-essential components of any effort to tackle the scourge of small arms and light weapons. Civil society

expects that governments will honour their obligation to create space for their voices, and expertise to be heard. We urge governments to represent the people of your nations by facilitating the voices of civil society at this Third Preparatory Committee and during the July Conference.

Thank you for your attention.

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