

The impact of small arms on women in Central Africa
Marie-Claire Faray-Kele, IANSa Women's Network
and The Women International League for Peace and Freedom DR Congo.

Thank you Mr. President,

Distinguished delegates of UN member states

It is with much interest that the women's network of IANSa followed the different interventions presented since the beginning of this meeting. This is an opportunity to advance the application of the Program of Action for the control of small arms and light weapons, in all its aspects, including gender violence.

The illicit use of small arms includes the offences of domestic violence as well as sexual violence against women.

It is recognised that women are less able to resist or to escape, and even less able to receive help from others, and thus to survive, a crime committed with a firearm.

Incidents of domestic violence involving firearms cause as many problems as violence perpetrated in the streets, and their number increases during and after armed conflicts, due to the illegal circulation of these arms in the community.

We are then encouraged by the states who have successfully harmonized their policies of arms control and their legislation regarding domestic violence. And we urge other states to follow this example. IANSa's women network has formulated some recommendations, translated into several languages, of which you can get a copy.

Mr. President,

Numerous reports and analyses have documented and demonstrated that the illegal trafficking, the availability, and the use of firearms have had a disastrous impact on the lives of women during conflicts which have ravaged the Great Lakes Region of Africa.

Let us take the example of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Sexual violence of an immeasurable atrocity has been made against women with the use of firearms. In the majority of cases, women have suffered physical and mental trauma which exceed all understanding of human nature and human imagination.

Many women were raped in front of their family and community under the menace of a firearm. They have been kidnapped and enlisted by force to serve in the rebels camps as sexual slaves. Consequently, many women have had unwanted pregnancies, some at a very young age, and they have been reduced to a state of human wreckage. There have been cases where child soldiers have raped and killed women (young and old), using their firearms like toys, which give them power.

Mr. President,

Allow me again to take the example of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Resolution 1756 of the Security Council links the illegal exploitation of natural resources and the illicit trafficking of small arms. This has a direct impact on the lives of women, because the majority of these illicit arms are in the hands of assailants who spread anarchy. In April 2008 alone, almost 900 cases of rape committed by armed men have been reported in the province of North Kivu in east Congo. Therefore, you can see that this conference room would be full of raped women.

The cases are so numerous that the Congolese hospitals do not have the capacity to help all the victims who come. Numbers of them do not even dare to go for fear of being disgraced and rejected by their community.

Mr. President,

These cruelties have been made possible because of the proliferation of small arms in the region of the Great Lakes of Africa to quench the thirst for natural resources of some individuals and organised groups. Women have been reduced to a state of non-existence, suffering the terrible psychological and psychosocial repercussions in an environment of absolute poverty.

The continual presence of armed bandits and hidden, non-declared arms in the Great Lakes Region has created very strong insecurity. Women living in absolute fear always feel threatened and cannot assert their demands! They do not know who to trust.

Mr. President,

In addition to the reports of rapes, there are also reports incriminating misbehaving agents mandated to ensure the security of populations and those who were supposed to maintain the peace in times of conflicts. Because of the lack of rigorous control, it is reported that those agents have trafficked and supplied arms to certain armed groups in exchange for natural resources. Therefore, how can we face this insecurity, especially when the trafficking, the sale, and the use of weapons remain uncontrolled, illegal, and unpunished?

Mr. President

It is true that the United Nations has made many efforts, in adopting Security Council Resolution 1325 on the participation of women in the consolidation of peace and reconstruction, as well as the new Resolution 1820 which demands the immediate and complete end of sexual violence in conflict zones. But these resolutions will not be put into action as long as women are the victims of domestic and sexual violence due to small arms outside all control. What would be their relevance?

Mr. President,

Firearms are conceived and perceived as a detonator of death, regardless of whether it is aimed at animals or at humans. Women and children make up the largest number of human victims.

In this year where we celebrate the 60 years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we call on the States which have the duty to protect the most vulnerable groups of their populations against the threat of firearms, in particular, the victims of domestic violence and sexual violence.

Mr. President

Distinguished delegates

I thank you again for your attention.