

Launch of New WILPF Report at the UN Headquarters in New York

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WILPF

On 6 June 2016, the Women's International League of Peace and Freedom's Disarmament programme, Reaching Critical Will, launched a report, *Preventing gender-based violence through arms control*, at a side event to the Sixth Biennial Meeting of States (BMS6).

The report, which was authored by Rebecca Gerome, discusses tools and guidelines for effective implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (UNPoA) provisions related to gender-based violence (GBV). The panel of speakers, Gerome along with Reaching Critical Will's Mia Gandenberger and Marren Akatsa-Bukachi of the IANSA Women's Network, presented the key findings in the report and addressed the link between gender and disarmament.

Gandenberger spoke of the invisible violence that is GBV. She explained the ATT is the first international agreement that recognises the link between GBV and the arms trade. She also noted that women should not just be treated as vulnerable or as victims, but as actors with equitable contributions to make to arms control and disarmament.

Gerome spoke of the demographics of GBV, discussing the patterns of gun violence, in particular the pattern of gender and age. She spoke of how despite 80-90% of gun homicide victims are made up of young men, women are affected and involved and constitute the majority of GBV victims. Furthermore, Gerome discussed the notion of gender as a socially constructed concept and the uneven power relations that GBV is rooted in. She highlighted Article 7.4 of the ATT, which stipulates that states are committed to taking GBV into account as binding criteria when assessing whether or not to export arms. She noted that unlike the ATT, the UNPoA makes no mention of gender; however, there have been some developments as of June 2014, with reference to women in policy making.

Gerome discussed her research process in writing the report and spoke of the lack of data and the difficulties in collecting it. She explained the differing requirements of countries when conducting risk assessments and noted that to date, no countries have specific language on GBV in their documentation,

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only incorporating it more broadly under the banner of human rights. She discussed her finding that many arms exporters didn't have expertise in GBV or the gender component of arms trade nor did they have enough time to make risk assessments due to constraints. She further called for consultation with women's groups in all sectors of society to ensure gender mainstreaming into the implementation of the UNPoA. Akatsa-Bukachi spoke of the connection between gender and disarmament, recounting an example from Uganda to highlight the unequal power relations between men and women and the link between domestic violence and access to arms. She presented statistics regarding the proliferation of firearms including that abusers with gun access are seven times more likely to kill their partners and that having a gun in the home increases chances of death by up to 20 times.

Akatsa-Bukachi further spoke of issues of prohibition and methods of limiting access. In closing, the audience was given an opportunity to contribute to discussion, conversation was thought provoking and lively, ultimately concluding with the sentiment that gender-based violence is not just a women's issue but an issue for everyone, and that patriarchal norms and violent masculinities are present in today's global society and as such it is important to disarm gender based violence.