

Sustainable Development and Small Arms Control

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I am Nadira Mallik from South Asia Partnership – Bangladesh, based in Dhaka. We are a member of IANSA. I am also a member of IANSA's women's network and a member of the steering committee of the South Asia Small Arms Network.

The misuse of arms in the South Asian region is a major problem and presents many challenges. My organisation works at both the national and regional level. From this work, it is clear that the availability and misuse of these weapons has a direct detrimental impact on sustainable development and economic empowerment.

The link between violent crime, armed conflict and increasing poverty has been established by several studies conducted by NGOs and international organisations such as the World Health Organisation and the UN Development Programme.

In fact, insecurity in general deters investment and countries often have to spend more money on dealing with the consequences of violence than on health and education. For example, in 2003 violence cost El Salvador the equivalent of five percent of their GDP – more than twice it spent on education and health.

As NGOs, we are particularly pleased to note that the humanitarian and development impacts of small arms are being increasingly recognised in UN Summits and General Assembly Resolutions and that the link between security, development, and small arms control is being explicitly articulated in these forums.

In my country, Bangladesh, for example, it is becoming common for groups with access to fire arms to terrorise and threaten business entrepreneurs, sometimes even killing the primary head of the household. This obviously impacts at both the economic and social levels.

People are not keen to become businessmen or women if they are going to face extortion or murder. At the family level, losing the head of the household means that children cannot go to school and may go hungry. Many turn to prostitution or are exploited as child labourers in order for them just to survive.

The family is often threatened into not reporting the incident to the police. These victimised families may suffer displacement in order to escape further harassment from these criminals. They lose their property and any possible livelihood.

This type of insecurity deters foreign and local investment, aggravates economic and social exclusion, undermines good governance, and places a heavy burden on social services, diverting resources from development.

What is being done to address this?

Several of the most significant groups of arms-exporting States have agreed in principal to prevent arms transfers where the value of the transfer would significantly hinder sustainable development of the recipient

state. It should be noted that it is the potential misuse of such weapons and not the monetary value of the transfer that potentially hinders sustainable development. These agreements include the Wassenaar Arrangement of 2002, the OSCE Document on Small Arms of 2000, and the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Transfer.

In conclusion and in light of what I've said, we recommend that:

- States prohibit transfers of small arms and light weapons where their likely misuse would hinder the sustainable development in the recipient state or their neighbours.

Monetary value alone is not an effective criterion to measure the potential misuse of a weapon. We would therefore need to develop more specific criteria and indicators of potential misuse.

- Armed violence reduction programs should be fully integrated into development frameworks. Where poverty drives people into occupations requiring weapons, governments and the donor community ought to promote alternative livelihoods and change attitudes towards gun ownership and possession.
- Armed violence is identified as a significant obstacle to development in Poverty Reduction Strategy papers and UN Development Assistance Frameworks. International Financial Institutions should support the inclusion of armed violence reduction programs in poverty reduction strategies.
- UN peace building strategies include weapons collection and destruction, stockpile management, the prevention of illicit transfers of small arms and light weapons, and more effective national arms regulations. In addition, the proposed UN Peacebuilding Commission should prioritise these activities while also facilitating long-term donor commitment to post-conflict states.

We would also strongly encourage more UN Member States to develop a policy such as those of the Netherlands and the UK of consulting their development agencies before authorising arms transfers. In this way, we can together more effectively curb the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons and begin to seriously address their detrimental impact on development. Thank you.