

Side event: Women's Human Rights—the ATT and CEDAW

Lily Gardener | Reaching Critical Will of WILPF

Friday's side event co-hosted by International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), the International Alliance of Women (IAW), Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), and UN Women looked at the connection between two treaties currently being discussed at the United Nations. The panel, chaired by Anne Marie Goetz, Chief Advisor, Peace and Security, UN Women, discussed how the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) along with the UN Security Council resolution 1325 et al. can work to prevent discrimination against women and gender-based violence (GBV), particularly in conflict and post-conflict situations.

Michèle Olga Pépé, IANSA Women's Network and the West African Action Network on Small Arms (WAANSA)-Côte d'Ivoire, described how small arms affect women in Côte d'Ivoire, what civil society is doing about this, and the link between peace and security. Pépé argued that where there are weapons, there is poverty, which interferes with women obtaining human rights. She explained that in Côte d'Ivoire, perpetrators of violence continue to hold guns. Achieving justice is almost impossible, and impunity continues to be a big problem for the region. While Côte d'Ivoire has a 1325 action plan, Pépé explained that it is not being implemented. Women hold only a handful of seats in parliament and CEDAW is predominately being implemented at the grass routes level. Pépé asked that the ATT reflect the voices of Côte d'Ivoire women and end the irresponsible arms trade.

Pramila Patten, CEDAW expert and Chair, Working Group on Women in Conflict and Post-conflict Situations, argued that there is a clear gender dimension to the arms trade, as women are increasingly and disproportionately affected by armed GBV. She raised concern that despite the ratification of CEDAW by 187 states parties, women and gender are being largely ignored in the process towards an ATT. Patten contended that some member states still have difficulty seeing the relationship between women, security, and arms control and the incidence of GBV perpetrated or facilitated by conventional weapons. She argued that the impact of armed violence on women's minds, bodies, and freedom remains quite invisible. There are no statistics when guns are not used to kill but to exert power behind closed doors. Patten arguing that CEDAW is a valid and important tool to be used in the demands that GBV be included in the criteria section of the ATT.

Nicole Ameline, Vice-Chair, CEDAW committee and expert, called for the need for a global approach to the arms trade under an ATT. She argued that in conflict and post-conflict situations women have their fundamental human rights disproportionately violated; therefore a responsible, transparent, and balanced treaty that reflects contemporary law of human security is required. Ameline noted the importance of NGOs in the ATT process, particularly with future implementation.

Vanessa Farr, International expert and consultant, WILPF, spoke about the necessity for women's leadership in issues of disarmament. She argued that in 2000, when the Millennium Development Goals were formulized, no mention of GBV and arms were included. There was not one single mention of ways in which organized and unorganized violence and/or conflict affects development. Farr argued that when small arms are prevalent in communities they destroy everything. Thus development issues cannot be divorced from arms and disarmament issues. She contended that CEDAW should be used, along with other treaties and legal dimensions that already exist, to call for

disarmament and arms regulation. Farr contended that gender awareness in the ATT would take forward the dream that hundreds of women fought for in Geneva almost 100 years ago.

Ray Acheson, Project Director of Reaching Critical Will, WILPF, provided an update of the ATT negotiations where the topic of gender had come to the forefront of discussions that morning. 48 states have now supported GBV to be included in the criteria. While a handful of delegations oppose the inclusion of GBV in criteria, Acheson argued it would be a step back to use “violence against women and children” instead of GBV as it weakens the language and does not acknowledge that the arms trade affects everyone—men, women, boys, and girls—in different ways. Amnesty International, IANSA, WILPF, and Religions for Peace have suggested language that arms transfers be denied when likely to be used to perpetrate or facilitate acts of gender-based violence, including rape and other forms of sexual violence.

If the ATT is to be an effective legal instrument in regulating the international arms trade, recognition of the specific potential impacts of international transfers on women and their rights should be included. As illustrated by the panel discussion, such an approach would be consistent with broader UN practice of the inclusion of a gender perspective. It would also ensure that the international standards within the ATT to regulate conventional arms comprehensively addresses the full range of potential risks associated with trading and transfers. •