

# International Women's Day Seminar

- Outcome document 2013



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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On Monday, 11 March, WILPF held a seminar on ‘Preventing Gender-Based Violence through the Arms Trade Treaty’ in Geneva to mark the occasion of [International Women’s Day](#). Representatives from governments, international organizations, and civil society participated.

**Beatrice Fihn (Manager, Reaching Critical Will of WILPF)** highlighted in her opening remarks that the wide spread and accessibility of weapons has been a major concern of WILPF’s for a long time now. After the long disappointing failure of Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) negotiations last July, Beatrice stressed the fact that the upcoming negotiations must result in an effective treaty that will help prevent armed gender-based violence (GBV) . She called upon all countries not just to agree that GBV is an important issue, but to actively promote it during negotiations as a key issue for the treaty.

**Madeleine Rees (Secretary General of WILPF)** talked about the legal aspects of a possible ATT, focusing on the consequences for women. She stressed the fact that WILPF supports a robust, comprehensive ATT and emphasized that GBV has to be included. However, she cautioned that there should rather be no ATT than one that will do more harm than good in the end.

She noted that the language used in the final treaty will not only serve as a basis for the ATT but also for other resolutions and international agreements, so it is important to get it right at this point. In the current ATT draft text, GBV is included in article 4(6), which only suggests voluntary “feasible measures” to reduce the risk that weapons will be used to commit acts of GBV. This formulation is less than helpful; it undermines existing commitments to prevent GBV.

WILPF has two concrete demands regarding the draft: first, to change the language in the preamble from violence against women to GBV; and second to move GBV from article 4(6) up to article 4(2) alongside human rights. Gender is too often confused with women; as Madeleine cogently asserted, if we reduce the language to women and children we are missing 49% of the population.

**Dr. Anna Alvazzi del Frate (Small Arms Survey)** discussed how violence against women and girls is poorly measured. By using women and girls as a proxy for GBV, one misses certain aspects of reality. Studies have shown that women are proportionally much more often victims in countries with a low level of violence than with a high level. However, the use of firearms regarding so-called femicides increases from only 33% in general to around 80% in places where large numbers of firearms are available. In the latter there is no difference in the modus operandi between women and men killed by firearms, which would suggest it is better to not use the language of violence against women and girls but rather GBV.

Mrs. Alvazzi del Frate argued that it is important to pay attention to what is measurable in order to implement the treaty effectively. Even though there is only scarce evidence at this point about firearms control legislation, examples such as South Africa show that they can have a major impact. In South Africa a significant reduction within 10 years was clearly correlated to the introduction of firearms control.

**Ambassador Peter Woolcott (ATT Chair)** made a short statement about the upcoming ATT negotiations and what can be expected from the next two weeks. After over ten years of work on a possible treaty on arms trade this is now the final phase where all will be decided. He asserted that the mandate of the chair is to ensure that the treaty will be strong, effective, and balanced and also to deliver a consensus outcome.

Ambassador Woolcott made it clear that civil society plays an important role in preparations for the negotiation. However, he made it unequivocally clear that in order for an issue to be included in the draft, it is really important that countries speak up. He noted that as in any negotiations, language on specific provisions of the treaty will have to be defended in order to stay, and even more active work will be needed to improve it.

**Ambassador Jo Adamson (UK)** talked about why the UK government thinks that is important to tackle the issue of GBV, and how they along with others can take action in order to combat it. The ATT is seen as an important part on how to take action and part of the game-changing actions that have to be taken during the year 2013.

To begin with, Ambassador Adamson laid out some of the shocking statistics. In her opinion violence against women and girls does not only violate women's human rights, but it at the same time reduces progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Outlining the UK's actions, Ambassador Adamson asserted that the UK has the prevention of GBV at the heart of its international development work and has also invested £25 million in research and innovation regarding this issue. Furthermore the UK wants to use its G8 Presidency to foster international commitments and to secure a clear political statement. Recently, a new Commonwealth Charter was signed that directly addresses gender equality. The UK will use the existing language from this and other documents to achieve the goal of including GBV in the final ATT.

From WILPF's perspective, the seminar strengthened the position that GBV has to be included in the ATT. Our recommendations are the following:

- Gender-based violence must be moved into **article 4(2) along with IHL and HR law**. It must be subject to transfer prohibitions, not voluntary risk mitigation measures;
- The **preamble** of the treaty should include the following sentence: "*Recognizing* the gendered dimensions and impacts of the arms trade, particularly gender-based violence, and further emphasizing and reaffirming the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding and arms control;" and
- The term **gender-based violence** should be used, rather than **violence against women**. Gender is an internationally accepted term used in UN General

Assembly and UN Security Council resolutions. The term “gender-based violence” acknowledges the gender dimensions of armed violence, from the perspective of both the perpetrator and the victim.