

In Harm's Way: Girls in Settings of Endemic Armed Violence

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Introduction by Ambassador Mona Juul of Norway

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Armed violence – associated with conflict, crime and interpersonal violence – is an epidemic of global proportions. It represents a fundamental challenge to our common developmental and humanitarian goals, including the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Conservatively estimated, three quarters of a million people are killed by armed violence each year. Millions more survive but face life-long disabilities. Beyond direct deaths and injuries, armed violence destroys human, economic and physical capital. States, international organisations and civil society need to work together to address this global challenge.

The impact of armed violence on national economies and human development cannot be overstated. In addition to the deaths and injuries that are directly attributable to gun violence, large numbers of people die each year as a result of indirect effects, and millions more lose their livelihoods. This again increases the number of people living in poverty and sets back the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Estimates tell us that conflict-related violence decreases the annual growth of an average economy by around 2% per year.

In non-conflict countries with high levels of crime and violence, such as Brazil or Guatemala, the cost of violence is estimated at 7.3% of GDP. As a result, a large proportion of scarce resources have to be spent on increased security measures instead of on education and health care. Globally, the cost of non-conflict or criminal violence has been estimated at USD 163 billion per year – significantly more than the USD 120 billion spent on development assistance last year.

It is now commonsense to include the role of girls and women when assessing economic and social growth. It is, however, only recently that violence against women is being recognized as a development concern. Although men are most commonly the direct victims of armed homicide, women, children and other vulnerable groups suffer disproportionate impacts through the loss of a breadwinner or a protector, the burden of care for injured family members, the collapse or inaccessibility of health and education services, disruptions to livelihoods and sexual violence.

In situations of armed violence, gender-based and sexual violence often escalates. It's been said that it is now more dangerous to be a woman than to be a soldier in modern armed conflicts. Rape and sexual violence is endemic in many conflict zones and girls and women fall prey to perpetrators from armed groups. As the conflicts endure and the fabric of society breaks down, rape spreads throughout communities and is often considered to be an inevitable side effect of war. After the guns fall silent, rape and sexual violence continue and often escalates, prolonging the conflict and deepening the suffering of individuals, families and communities.

Norway and UNDP will in April this year host a high-level conference on armed violence in Oslo. The intent of this conference is to establish a framework for actions to achieve measurable reduction in the global burden of armed violence by 2015. This framework builds on the commitments made in the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence, and on the recommendations in the 2009 Secretary-General's report on armed violence and development. We will ask States attending the conference to commit themselves to take a comprehensive approach to address armed violence, reinforcing current policies and actions on different arenas. Specifically, the Oslo Commitments will call for the inclusion of armed violence prevention and reduction efforts both in the MDG review process and in the subsequent implementation strategies.

A central aspect of this process emphasises the need for practitioners, policymakers, and the general public to get a better overview of the problem of armed violence. This particularly important with regards to the link between women's roles and the impact of violence. In order to achieve a fuller and more nuanced understanding of gender-based armed violence, researchers must recognize its complexity of the issue. Women are victims and agent of violence in both private and public spheres, and these forms of violence are not necessarily distinct. A research agenda that aims to capture

the full array of impacts therefore need to include all forms of gender-based armed violence, from domestic violence to rape as a weapon of war.

We are determined to work for the prevention and reduction of armed violence, as it represents a major threat to development, human rights and cause unacceptable human suffering every day.

Thank you