

**Gender and the PoA: including all voices**

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**Making the invisible visible: The impact of small arms on women and girls in Colombia, in armed conflict and in homes**

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Somewhere in Colombia, a girl is hiding. Somewhere in Colombia, a woman is silently enduring her husband's beatings. Somewhere in Colombia, an adolescent girl is being raped in front of her community. Somewhere in Colombia, a woman's tears are being silenced. What do these stories have in common? One word.

Guns.

Madam Chair, Members of the Panel, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of Adriana, Kelly, Martha, and Maria Gladys – the women in the film you have just seen - thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

Colombia's armed conflict, fueled by the drug trade and the availability of small arms, is the longest running conflict in the Western Hemisphere. The presence of guns in Colombia is strongly linked to a patriarchal and "machista" culture that supports the idea that men need guns to defend themselves and protect their families. Yet, instead of providing security, guns aid and exacerbate violence against women.

The words of the women in the film echo the experience of many women in Colombia. They reveal the invisible impact of gun violence: its impact on women's bodies, minds and freedom. We all see the death and injury rates of men. But what we don't see is when guns are not used to kill but to exert power. What we don't see, is when guns are used behind closed doors to subjugate and intimidate family members; when guns are used to threaten adolescent girls with sexual violence, forcing entire families to flee. What we don't see are the rapes of tens of thousands of women at gunpoint.

Between 60 and 70 percent of Colombian women have suffered some form of sexual, physical, emotional or political violence in their lives. The numbers are astonishing.

In 2008, there were 21,000 cases of sexual violence, many at gunpoint. Many women identify sexual violence at gunpoint as the direct cause of displacement. Consider this - Colombia has the second highest number of internally displaced people in the world after Sudan.

Surely we must stop and ask – how can this be?

Here we are, at the fourth Biennial Meeting of States on Small Arms. As you can see, gender plays an important role in both the demand and use of guns, which affect men and women differently. Because the

impact of small arms on women remains largely invisible, it is key to mainstream gender in the implementation of the PoA.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Legally held small arms can be diverted to illicit use – a weapon held for legal purposes, for example, by an employee of a private security agency, can be used to kill, threaten or intimidate an intimate partner. The presence of small arms in the home is often a result of diversion to civilians which, in turn, fuels the illicit supply.

On January 1st, 2009, in Sincelejo, northern Colombia, Jose Luis Reales, an escort and security guard for the Ministry of Justice and Interior threatened his ex-wife, Nela Patricia Salcedo in the street. Her aunt tried to intervene, but he took out his firearm and shot her three times. Then he shot his ex-wife and himself, in front of their 2 year old daughter and 6 year old son. Nela Patricia had separated from him a few months earlier because he was violent.

This is not an isolated case. In many cases of armed domestic violence, the perpetrator uses a legal gun in an illicit act - a criminal act - and often has a prior history of domestic violence.

In 2008, the Colombian congress passed law 1257 as a result of lobbying by women's networks. This law requires that a gun be removed from an aggressor in incidents of domestic violence, yet it is still not being implemented. Many authorities are unaware of the existence of this law. Women report that the police often do not take the necessary steps, and they and their children have to go home to violent husbands, including those with guns. Perpetrators of gender-based violence go unpunished in an astounding 97 percent of cases.

Women's groups are working hard to promote law 1257 by conducting trainings for women and local authorities. Although the PoA calls on States to support civil society efforts and to improve law enforcement mechanisms, women are not enjoying the support and assistance they need.

As we know, laws alone are not enough. In fact, the Guidelines for Gender Mainstreaming of the Program of Action can offer useful guidance on how to better implement laws. This includes training for the law enforcement community and appropriate training materials and resources that contain gender-specific best practices. The objective is to offer officials basic awareness of existing laws and guidelines on how to implement them.

The Gender Guidelines also reaffirm the principles in UN Security Council Resolution 1820. In particular, they call for specific interventions to deal with the impacts of sexual violence, to assist women and men, survivors and perpetrators.

These recommendations are not new. They did not appear out of nowhere. Nor are they impossible to implement.

As far back as 2001, coalitions of women such as the Colectivo Mujeres Pazificas have raised awareness about sexual violence in Colombia's armed conflict through a campaign called "Our bodies are not a battlefield". They also created the Political School of Pacific Women to train women to take on leadership roles and more actively participate in the peace process. Women have been working on these issues for years, and governments can simply follow their lead and support their initiatives.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Violence in the home and the armed conflict feed each other in an unending cycle. These are not simple issues. The drug trade, the persistence of the conflict and availability of guns make it difficult to find sustainable solutions. But these cannot justify apathy, silence, and inaction.

In fact, there are three basic steps we can start doing right now by adopting the Gender Guidelines:

**1) The first step is data collection.** States must integrate gender analysis and the provision of gender-specific data as a component of all small arms control planning and implementation. Without accurate data on gun possession and trafficking and their links to violence against women, it is impossible to formulate successful public policies on these issues.

**2) States must develop and implement national legislation. The Guidelines call upon States to :**

- Incorporate gender dimensions in national legislation on small arms;
- Build capacities in law enforcement to incorporate a gender perspective;

**3) Increase women's participation: the Guidelines and Resolution 1325 recognize women's knowledge and expertise.** It is essential to:

- Incorporate the knowledge and experience of women's organizations in exchanges and training programs, and use them as a resource;
- Include women in National Commissions on Small Arms;
- Work to increase the number of women officials in customs, police, intelligence and arms control as well as in DDR and peace processes.

Gender equality and empowerment of women - the third Millennium Development Goal – cannot be achieved without eliminating the illicit trade and use of small arms, and their use in violence against women.

Today, for Adriana, Kelly, Maria Gladys, and Martha, and for all of us, we must engender the PoA and turn its words into concrete and gender responsive actions.

Thank you for your attention.