

THE WASHINGTON NETWORK ON
 WNCAC
CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

Small Arms and Children and Armed Conflict
Meeting Notes, February 8th, 2006

Please note: The opinions expressed in WNCAC meetings and reflected in these notes are those of the individual participants and are not endorsed by the WNCAC, which provides an open forum for exchange among those concerned with children affected by armed conflict.

The February meeting of the Washington Network on Children and Armed Conflict focused on the relationship between trafficking of small arms and children affected by armed conflict. Specifically, discussion focused on the impact of small arms trafficking on programming and policy to protect children in war zones. Participants also discussed efforts that are underway to raise awareness of the linkages between small arms trafficking and child rights issues.

The conversation was framed by *Richelle Smockum* of the Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and *Rachel Stohl* of the Center for Defense Information.

Discussion Points:

What are the main impacts of small arms trafficking?

- Death, injury, and maiming
- Enabling of human rights abuses, such as torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence
- Forced recruitment of children as soldiers
 - Children also become more attractive recruits because of the ease with which they can use small arms.
- Psychological trauma for those who witness and participate in violence caused by small arms
- Refugees and internally displaced persons due to forced migration at the threat of a gun
 - The presence of small arms also makes life dangerous in camps.
- Limited access to goods, services, education, and healthcare
 - Traveling to schools can become unsafe, and forced recruitment of soldiers can also take place at schools.
 - Teachers are unable to discipline their students for fear that they may have guns.
 - Small arms violence affects the grazing patterns of animals and enables the looting of food distribution centers.

- Aid workers are unable to provide services as they have been targeted for gun violence.
- Vaccination programs and other limited healthcare resources suffer due to gun violence.
- Loss of access to economic opportunities
 - Transportation routes are blocked, which harms the economy.
 - Societies redirect resources from investments in infrastructure and the economy to efforts that promote stability.
- Separation of families and weakening of the family structure
 - Children are often separated from their parents and are forced to take on adult responsibilities at a young age.
- Creation of a culture of violence
 - Weapons are seen as symbols of power, dominance, and worth, and it becomes difficult for young people to seek other opportunities. Impunity also flourishes.

What is the status of the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons?

- The Programme of Action (PoA) was originally drafted in 2001, with a commitment to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in all its aspects.
- The PoA only mentions children in special circumstances, such as special victims of armed conflict and as child soldiers. These reference are contained in the preambular paragraphs and thus do not contain specific recommendations or obligations for states to address the impact of SALW on children.
- In 2005, the PoA Biennial Meeting of States revealed that while some progress has been made, it is clear that further action is required for states to fully implement the PoA.
- The United Nations will be reviewing the PoA in June 2006. The Canadian government approaches small arms as a human security issue and as such would like to see discussion of the humanitarian and development impact of SALW occur at the Review Conference.
- The Chair of the Review Conference will draft an outcome document with suggested actions to achieve the goals and objectives of the UN Programme of Action.
 - During the Chair's consultation process with states and NGOs, opportunities will exist to raise the Chair's awareness of the linkages between small arms and children affected by armed conflict (CAAC).
- While the work of the CAAC and SALW communities clearly overlap, there has been little cross-over at the policy level. The Review Conference provides an excellent opportunity for these communities to come together to provide a coherent and comprehensive approach to preventing the proliferation and misuse of small arms and thus their negative impacts on children and their families.
- Please see the following web sites for more information and papers on this topic:
 - http://www.humansecurity.gc.ca/f_policy_options_paper_small_arms_children-en.asp
 - http://www.crin.org/docs/Worldvision_Small_Arms_Paper.pdf

Input from meeting participants:

There were a range of questions and points raised by the participants in the meeting.

These included:

- Some expressed concern that the timetable for programming for children affected by conflict needs to be expanded.
 - During DDR programs, fighters will turn in two guns but keep three. Looting and vandalism can result, so there is a need to devote more time to post-conflict peacebuilding.
- There is tension between the need to disarm and the need to protect the legitimate ownership of guns.
 - Allowing certain people to keep certain numbers of guns makes it more difficult to disarm others.
 - On the other hand, some communities won't participate in DDR programs if there is a zero-tolerance policy for guns due to concerns that they may become vulnerable to attacks by other communities that are armed.
 - These challenges highlight the need to focus on broader community and regional-level disarmament rather than focusing solely on individual disarmament.
- There are some examples of programs that address the tension between legitimate and illegitimate gun possession:
 - Weapons for development pilot project in Albania
 - Viva Rio program in Brazil
 - This campaign spread anti-gun and anti-violence messages through soap operas and on t-shirts. Over 20 million people voted for a gun ban, as the program succeeded in affecting cultural norms.
 - Research is currently focusing on the factors that drive demand for small arms, and small arms programming is now being recognized as a form of development assistance.
- There will be opportunities to raise awareness of the small arms issue at events taking place this year:
 - Nairobi Assembly of Interparliamentary Union
 - Joint Parliamentary Assembly in Barbados
 - Review of the UN Programme of Action
 - Presentation of the UN Study on Violence Against Children to the General Assembly
- There is a need for small arms programming to be incorporated more into development strategy papers and frameworks.
- There is a lack of political will on the small arms issue, especially among the rich countries that have the most capacity to deal with this issue. One of the main obstacles is the fact that there are legitimate uses for small arms.
- Agencies should focus on how to fill the void when guns are removed. What can replace guns to help individuals feel empowered?

Resources and Program Sharing

Peacebuilding & Development Institute Youth & Conflict Conference

- April 14th and 15th at American University
- Topics will include the factors that pull young people into conflict, youth contributions to peacebuilding, and the relationship between policy and practice.
- For further information, including the Call for Papers, please visit the PDI website: www.american.edu/sis/peacebuilding
- Contact Saji Prelis at (202) 885-2014 or pdievents@american.edu with any questions.

Upcoming report on how youth experience genocide in Burundi and Congo; upcoming documentary on youth perspectives on how to assist tsunami victims

- Please contact Saji Prelis (saji@american.edu) for more information both the report and the documentary.

Serving Youth with Microfinance: Perspectives of Microfinance Institutions and Youth Serving Organizations

- This report by Chemonics International presents the findings of an electronic survey of microfinance institutions and youth serving organizations. The objective of the electronic survey was to examine the collective experience of microfinance providers to youth to better understand the supply-side perspective on key issues relating to the overall Microfinance, Youth and Conflict research initiative. The objective of the research initiative is to investigate the applicability of microfinance to youth in conflict-affected areas. The report can be accessed online at http://www.microlinks.org/ev_en.php?ID=9589_201&ID2=DO_TOPIC

Search for Common Guide on Youth Radio for Peacebuilding

- This soon-to-be-released guide is designed primarily for media professionals and will be distributed to the WNCAC membership as soon as it has been completed.
- For more information, please visit www.radiopeaceafrica.org