

Briefing Paper

Quaker United Nations Office - Geneva

The Geneva Declaration Process Linking Armed Violence Reduction and Development

Armed violence destroys lives and livelihoods, breeds insecurity, fear and terror, and has a profoundly negative impact on human development. Whether in situations of conflict or crime, it imposes enormous costs on states, communities and individuals.

- Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development

Fifteen years ago, small arms did not make the list of topics on the international agenda. However, as evidence mounted that violence related to these arms was “killing people in the hundreds and thousands,”¹ that began to change. Today, more than 700 non-governmental organizations around the world are active on the issue,² and various dimensions of small arms control are high on the international agenda. Increasingly, the value of considering demand-related aspects of small arms violence is being recognised. Traditionally, the international community has tended to focus on supply-side factors of small arms proliferation (such as production, stockpiling and transfers). QUNO was among the first to seriously consider the demand side of the equation, and to ask questions about why people acquire, use and abuse small arms. The Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development represents an important new process underway which largely embodies these demand concerns.

The Declaration

In June 2006, Switzerland and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) led 42 States to conclude the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, recognizing, “that armed violence and conflict impede [the] realization of the Millennium Development Goals, and that conflict prevention and resolution, violence reduction, human rights, good governance and peace-building are key steps towards reducing poverty, promoting economic growth and improving people’s lives.” The June ‘summit’ was timed to have an impact on the Review Conference on the Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons, scheduled for July 2006. The influence of the Geneva Declaration process on the small arms agenda remains strong, despite the failure of the Review Conference to produce an outcome document.

Joining the Dots

In 2000, world leaders prioritized development for the world’s poorest by elaborating 15 development-related goals to be achieved by 2015. The UN Secretary General’s 2005 report entitled “In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All,” noted that the accumulation of small arms is a threat to stability and sustainable development. The Outcome Document of the Millennium Summit in 2005 also made it clear that development, peace, security and human rights were strongly linked in mutually reinforcing ways.³ This short period of time has thus clearly established the understanding that, in the words of the Geneva Declaration, “living free from the threat of armed violence is...a precondition for human development, dignity and well-being.” In other words, freedom from want is inextricably linked to freedom from fear.

The “Development-Costs” of Armed Violence

Armed violence affects the poorest countries, diverting resources from development initiatives. The International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) has shown that “armed violence cost El Salvador \$1.7 billion in 2003, the equivalent of 11.5% of GDP, and more than twice as much as the country spends on health and education combined.”⁴ According to the Small Arms Working Group (SAWG), an alliance of U.S.-based NGOs, small arms proliferation undermines development because, “fragile economies are damaged by small arms that fuel conflict and crime, develop-

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ment projects are hindered or deterred by small arms-related violence and [even] the threat of small arms violence diverts scarce resources to security.”⁵ In addition, firearm injuries burden health facilities and have enormous economic costs. SAWG estimated that in 2000, the US paid over \$1.4 billion towards medical treatment of firearm injuries. Experts estimate the cost of small arms violence in Brazil at 10% of annual GDP,⁶ translating into a drain from the pool of resources, which could be used for development. It is not safe to assume a one-way relationship between small arms violence and development. The interplay between the two factors is much more complex, and in reality, “while economic development cannot successfully occur without addressing the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons, solving the arms problem cannot happen without addressing development.”⁷

In light of this evidence, the Geneva Declaration aligns itself with the MDGs by committing signatories to achieving, “by 2015, measurable reductions in the global burden of armed violence and tangible improvements in human security worldwide.”

Geneva Declaration Process: Partnering With Civil Society

“We will work in partnership with the development, peace and security-building, public health, humanitarian, human rights and criminal justice communities, and, recognizing the important role civil society has to play in reducing armed violence, promote active partnerships between governments, international organizations and civil society.”

- Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development

The Geneva Declaration process has thus far involved informal consultations between governments and two regional meetings in Latin America and Africa, which have resulted in Regional Declarations on Armed Violence. Future plans include an Asian regional meeting in May 2008, a review Summit in Geneva in June 2008 and the submission of a draft resolution on Armed Violence and Development to the UN General Assembly in late 2008. The concerned states have sought and welcomed the participation of civil society actors, who are best placed to offer their experience of programmes in the field to policy makers at municipal, national, regional and international levels.

Because of its earlier work on the small arms demand issue, QUNO has been given the role of coordinating civil society participation in the regional meetings that have been held in support of the Geneva Declaration and in facilitating an emerging partnership between governments and NGOs in the promotion of the Geneva Declaration goals and their implementation. QUNO will also facilitate efforts to build common language and discourse between the development and disarmament communities. In January 2008, QUNO will bring together experts from civil society in both fields to discuss civil society participation in the next phase of the Geneva Declaration process.

Getting involved

Find out whether your country supports the Geneva Declaration. Write to relevant Ministries encouraging them to engage with the Geneva Declaration process and in national implementation of the Geneva Declaration’s goals.

Watch the website of the Geneva Declaration for more information: www.genevadeclaration.org

QUNO will produce a regular newsletter on the Geneva Declaration process. If you would like to receive it, e mail quno1@quno.ch

Footnotes:

- 1) United Nations General Assembly, 1995. Supplement to the Agenda for Peace. A/50/60-S/1995/1, paras. 60-61. 3 January
- 2) Small Arms Survey Report, 2006
- 3) GA Res 60/1. 2005 World Summit Outcome, clause 9 <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/487/60/PDF/N0548760.pdf?OpenElement>
- 4) IANSA Factsheet: Gun Violence and Poverty - <http://www.iansa.org/documents/index.htm>
- 5) Small Arms Working Group Fact Sheets: Consequences of the Proliferation and Misuse of Small Arms and Light Weapons, p 8: http://www.iansa.org/documents/2006/factsheets/SAWG_Small_Arms_Fact_Sheets_2006.pdf
- 6) Ibid., p 14
- 7) Ibid., p 8