

# Converging Agendas

## WOMEN, PEACE, SECURITY, AND SMALL ARMS

In April 2013, women's organizations were among those celebrating the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) by the UN General Assembly. The ATT has been hailed as a victory for women; it will require states parties to take into account the risk of small arms being used to commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence, such as domestic and sexual violence, before authorizing their transfer abroad. Indeed, 2012–13 saw international policy concerning women, peace, and security and small arms finally converge. This owes much to the work of women and women's organizations, in collaboration with the broader civil society arms control movement.

This chapter:

- provides an overview of women, peace, and security issues, including the UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) on women, peace, and security, and women's diverse roles as users, victims, and challengers of small arms during and after armed conflict;
- analyses how the international policy framework on women, peace, and security has—and has not—addressed small arms;
- considers how small arms feature in national action plans (NAPs) on implementation of UNSCR 1325 and how women, peace, and security issues have been addressed in NAPs on small arms; and
- outlines how the women, peace, and security agenda has been embodied in recent developments in small arms law and policy, and how small arms issues have correspondingly been reflected in recent UNSCRs on women, peace, and security.

### Recognition and exclusion

During and following conflict, women and girls are often direct victims of small arms violence: domestic violence, sexual violence (including that associated with forcible recruitment into armed groups), injury, and murder. Indirect consequences include taking care of injured family members and an inability to access work, education, and health care. Yet armed conflict can also create spaces to transcend traditional gender roles. While some women and girls willingly smuggle weapons or take up arms as combatants, others become community leaders at the forefront of local, national, and international initiatives to control arms.

The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a key policy framework for women's equality, explicitly links the arms trade to armed violence and outlines how women are both victims of armed violence and actors for arms control and disarmament.



A woman poses with her husband's assault rifle in the weapons workshop that he runs from their home, Misrata, Libya, June 2011.

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Nonetheless, in 2000, when the Security Council took the groundbreaking step of adopting a resolution on women, peace, and security, UNSCR 1325, it mentioned disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR), but not ‘small arms’, the ‘arms trade’, or ‘weapons’. Until 2013, follow-up UNSCRs on women, peace, and security were likewise silent on these topics.

**UN monitoring frameworks on UNSCR 1325 include indicators on small arms and disarmament.**

Research and activism by civil society organizations (CSOs) has demonstrated the relevance of UNSCR 1325 to small arms policy and practice. CSOs, UN agencies, the UN Secretary-General, and the UN Committee that monitors implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) have linked mandates in the UNSCRs on women, peace, and security to small arms, notably with respect to:

- the protection of civilians, including from sexual violence;
- women’s participation;
- support for local women’s peace and conflict resolution; and
- inclusive DDR.

### **National implementation**

At the national level, progress in harmonizing policy concerning small arms control and women, peace, and security has been limited. One-quarter of the 43 1325 NAPs that were adopted before the end of 2013 refer to small arms; however, they rarely operationalize this policy linkage by requiring concrete actions. Nor do any of the 1325 NAPs refer to the need for arms regulation itself to be gender-responsive, for instance through provisions to prevent the threat or use of small arms in domestic violence.

The 1325 NAPs of Senegal and the Philippines have the most detailed provisions on small arms. In Senegal, it appears that this has helped to drive action to address domestic violence in firearm regulation. In the Philippines, the development of new firearms legislation demonstrates that sustained focus by CSOs is needed to keep women on the small arms agenda.

NAPs on small arms only occasionally mention women—such as by referring to the importance of women’s participation in community education—and rarely translate this into required action. In a number of countries, however, domestic violence has been prioritized in the licensing of civilian small arms and other protocols, with some success.

### **Linking up the international policy frameworks**

On the international level, normative convergence of the women, peace, and security and arms control agendas began in 2012, when the outcome of the 2012 Review Conference of the UN Programme of Action referred to women’s participation and victimization. The text of the ATT, adopted the following year, requires a risk assessment for gender-based violence prior to any export of arms. The UNSCR on small arms of September 2013 emphasizes women’s participation in combating their illicit transfer and misuse.

In parallel, the two resolutions on women, peace, and security of 2013 reaffirm the provisions in the ATT; the second of these, UNSCR 2122, contains a groundbreaking operative paragraph urging women’s full participation in eradicating the illicit transfer and misuse of small arms. The CEDAW Committee’s general recommendation on women in conflict prevention, conflict, and post-conflict situations—released in 2013—calls for arms control to prevent gender-based violence.

**International law obligations on the prevention of violence against women are applicable to small arms control.**

These are piecemeal but important achievements. Regional and national strategies on UNSCR 1325 and on small arms have the potential to be stronger and more effective by giving concrete expression to this policy convergence, for example by focusing on preventing domestic violence, removing arms from communities, and consulting with women’s CSOs. Women’s networks and organizations have been, and can continue to be, partners in policy and legislative development, and in small arms reduction and education processes. They will no doubt play a key role in monitoring the concrete action and robust accountability needed. ■