



## **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**

### **Remarks by Jamila Seftaoui Senior Adviser on Gender Issues**

#### **OSCE Meeting to Review the OSCE Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and Its Supplementary Decisions**

Vienna, 22 September 2009

Mme/Mr Chairperson,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we gather in this meeting to focus on the OSCE documents for the control of SALW, there are several reasons to acknowledge the link between gender issues and arms control, and the benefits of addressing one issue in relation to the other.

The environment in which SALW are produced, traded, used and misused, trafficked, hidden and feared is not a gender neutral one, and therefore has differentiated impacts on women and men, on girls and boys. Indeed, in unstable environments there is an obvious association of masculinity with the possession and use of weapons.

Supply and demand of SALW remains firmly in the control of men. Small arms are, for the most part, bought, owned and used by men. Men also make up the majority of those killed by SALW. Women, however, make up a greater proportion of those who suffer the longer-term effects, both directly and indirectly from armed violence.

The existence of SALW creates and sustains a climate of continuous fear and undermines the security of women. The proliferation and lack of control of SALW facilitate the intimidation and abuse of women. There is a growing body of evidence that shows a significant increase in severe forms of violence against women when SALW are easily available in a given environment. Often, they are used in conjunction with human rights violations and crimes such as rape, abduction, torture, coerced recruitment, theft, looting, forced displacement, extortion.

Reports from areas showing a high proliferation of SALW bring evidence that women in those areas are severely hindered in their capacity to carry out daily functions. The availability and use of SALW also restrict women's access to basic services such as health care and education.

The easy availability of SALW increases tremendously the threat to women's security and, according to UN studies, multiplies their risk of death in both the home and the community.

Instability in women's living environment is exacerbated by the easy access to SALW. Women live in continuous fear of armed violence, not only against themselves but also against male members of their families, knowing that they will carry the greatest burden of caring for the injured, traumatized, disabled or orphaned.

For these many reasons, women are strong advocates in combating the spread of SALW. In many countries, women's associations actively take part in the public debate on SALW, exerting pressure on society and policy makers to better monitor their supply, reduce their demand, recover and stock them in a controlled and responsible manner.

Within this role, women are powerful allies and partners in designing and gaining support for SALW-control programmes. Because they associate SALW with insecurity, fear, conflict and death, they are usually integral actors in convincing those who possess illicit weapons to turn them in. As care-takers in post-conflict regions, women are particularly sensitive to the well-being of others. They are more likely to be interested in long term security perspectives and often possess valuable information on the whereabouts of secret stores of SALW.

Increased consideration should, therefore, be given to the numerous gender aspects of SALW control. Ensuring a more gender-inclusive analysis and implementation of SALW control are crucial for comprehensive security and women's ability to contribute to the development of their societies.

Research indicates that armed violence is the result of both legally and illegally traded SALW and that their use is not restricted to post conflict areas or unstable environment. Indeed, severe SALW accidents occur increasingly in many OSCE countries known for their stability and security. A fact made all too obvious by the regular news headlines on shootings in schools, in the workplace or in public places.

Together, these facts reveal the need to improve and reform national as well as international laws and controls. The SALW-control programmes should aim to reduce the proliferation of small arms in, not only post conflict areas, but throughout the OSCE. OSCE documents should reflect the understanding of the gender-differentiated dynamics of SALW.

In addition to the most relevant international instrument on SALW control, the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects (PoA) and the instrument on the inclusion of women in security and peace building, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, the OSCE has adopted a plan for the promotion of gender equality in 2004 (MC. Dec 14/04) and an MC Decision to integrate women's concerns and contributions into conflict prevention, crisis management and peace rehabilitation in 2005 (MC. Dec. 14/05).

As mentioned by the Secretary General today in his opening address, the OSCE has, since 1999, worked hard to establish a framework that allows for the combating of illicit trafficking and use of small arms and light weapons.

There is a need, now more than ever, for the OSCE to tap into the benefits of including gender perspectives within policies on arms control and the establishment of a peaceful environment.

In their current form, the OSCE documents make no reference to gender perspectives in SALW. An updated version making use of a gender analysis and mainstreaming would offer the opportunity to highlight the many entry points for gender inclusion within relevant OSCE texts and policies on SALW control, thereby increasing the effectiveness of the OSCE SALW control programmes.

The new version of the OSCE documents on SALW and any future SALW policy should take into account the intersection between current OSCE MC Decisions and instruments on human rights and gender equality and recognize that cross cutting gender mainstreaming is a valuable strategy making OSCE development, peace and security operations more effective.

Thank you