

**small arms
and children:**
progress since 2001 and
recommendations
for further action

Small Arms and Children: Progress since 2001 and Recommendations for Further Action



This policy document is a companion piece to, “Children and Small Arms: Needs Assessment Survey Results and Analysis” and builds on the policy options and research papers entitled, respectively, “Small Arms, children and armed conflict: Policy Options for Effective Action”, and “Small arms, children and armed conflict: Background Research Paper”, produced by World Vision Canada in 2004.

Copies of all World Vision Canada documents on small arms and children can be found at: worldvision.ca/policy

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Introduction

Although the impacts of small arms on the lives of children are often absent from small arms policy discussions, small arms affect children in many detrimental ways. These impacts can be categorized into direct, indirect, and consequential effects.

Directly, children suffer death and injury from the barrels of guns around the world. The Small Arms Survey reports that the majority (53%) of gun murder victims are under 30¹. Small arms and light weapons are also regularly used to commit abuses of the rights of children, and small-arms fuelled conflicts often cause massive population displacement, uprooting millions of children from their homes. Moreover, children not only suffer physical wounds from small arms, but also experience psychosocial trauma when they become victims of or witness the misuse of small arms.

Indirectly, small arms diminish the support structures and opportunities that children need to survive. The proliferation of small arms limits children's access to health care, education, food, water, and humanitarian assistance. Small arms can devastate families by causing the death or injury of a parent or the forced separation of children. In situations of armed conflict, societies often must redirect resources away from building community infrastructures in order to address widespread lack of security. The resulting economic instability and lack of economic opportunities deny children, and most crucially adolescents, access to education, livelihoods, support services and skills training.

A tragic consequence of the easy availability of small arms is the hundreds of thousands of armed children, many of whom are serving as child soldiers in over 20 conflicts around the world. Even in peaceful countries, there are many thousands of children in organized armed violence. Children patrol group territories openly armed in parts of Brazil, Colombia, Nigeria and the Philippines, according to recent research. Small arms are lightweight and simple to use, easily turning a child as young as seven into a skilled combatant. Even

amend small arms policies to make them coherent with child protection measures

when children are not used as fighting forces directly, the proliferation and misuse of small arms enables a culture of violence to emerge in the affected area, whereby small arms are viewed as symbols of power, dominance, and worth. Children in such communities grow up to believe that violence, especially from small arms and light weapons, is essential for gaining power, obtaining goods and services, and establishing respect, thus perpetuating the culture of violence.

Progress since 2001

The international community has mostly addressed the rights of children in situations of armed conflict and small arms issues independently; only in the last five years have the two issues been linked in global, regional, and national initiatives. However, the importance of small arms is well-recognized in international statements and agreements on Children and Armed Conflict. Controlling small arms, banning landmines, and reducing access to other weapons were combined as one of ten priorities in the groundbreaking UN report on The Impact of War on Children, by Graça Machel in 1996. In her 2000 update, Graça Machel dedicated an entire chapter to small arms as an important factor in the abuse of children. Since then, almost every major report on children and armed conflict includes references to the need to address the issue of easy access to small arms. Small arms

¹Small Arms Survey 2004: Rights at Risk, 2004, Figure 6.5, p. 180

provisions within child-focused efforts are now considerably stronger than similar provisions for taking action within small arms initiatives.

In order to sufficiently address the effects of small arms on children, future small arms initiatives must include specific reference to the special needs and situations of children. Such efforts should reinforce those standards already laid out in UN Security Council Resolutions and other child-based strategies.

How does the PoA address the problem?

The UN Small Arms Programme of Action (PoA) refers specifically to children twice. Preambular paragraph six reflects the varied effects of the illicit trade in small arms on children, stating that participating states are, “Gravely concerned about its devastating consequences on children, many of whom are victims of armed conflict or are forced to become child soldiers, as well as the negative impact on women and the elderly, and in this context, taking into account the special session of the United Nations General Assembly on Children.”

In the operational paragraphs, section II, paragraph 22, the PoA encourages states at the national level, “to address the special needs of children affected by armed conflict, in particular the reunification with their family, their reintegration into civil society, and their appropriate rehabilitation.”

Progress at the global level

The body of child-focused policy has, to date, incorporated small arms control strategies in a more comprehensive way than small arms-focused measures have addressed the particular rights and needs of children. UN Security Council Resolutions on children and armed conflict, for example, include measures for reducing the proliferation of small arms. Equivalent strategies to stop the flow of arms to forces that violate the rights of children are absent in statements on small arms. In order to achieve coherence, which is now a priority for the UN, small arms policies need to

be amended to make them coherent with the child protection measures.

The 2002 UN Special Session on Children concluded with the adoption of the action plan, “A World Fit For Children.” Section 44, paragraph 26 of this action plan strongly makes the link with the small arms issue and states as a goal for participating states to, “Curb the illicit flow of small arms and light weapons and protect children from landmines, unexploded ordnances, and other war material that victimize them...” This standard was put into practice in the subsequent UN Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict.

Paragraph seven of the 2003 Security Council Resolution 1460:

"Urges Member States, in accordance with the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons, to take effective action through, inter alia, conflict resolution and the development and implementation of national legislation, in a manner which is consistent with existing responsibilities of States under relevant international law, to control the illicit trade in small arms to parties in armed conflict that do not respect fully the relevant provisions of applicable international law relating to the rights and protection of children in armed conflict."

The 2004 Resolution 1539 builds on Resolution 1460 in three ways. One paragraph focuses on implementation of controls on the illicit trade in small arms and other resources, and controls on cross-border trafficking:

"Expresses its intention to take appropriate measures, in particular while considering sub regional and cross-border activities, to curb linkages between illicit trade in natural and other resources, illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons, cross-border abduction and recruitment, and armed conflict, which can prolong armed conflict and intensify its impact on children, and consequently requests the Secretary-General to propose effective measures to control this illicit trade and trafficking."

The second provision relates to ending the use of child soldiers. The resolution calls for specific steps to end

the practice. If these steps are not taken, the Security Council:

"(c) Expresses its intention to consider imposing targeted and graduated measures, through country-specific resolutions, such as, inter alia, a ban on the export or supply of small arms and light weapons and of other military equipment and on military assistance, against these parties if they refuse to enter into dialogue, fail to develop an action plan or fail to meet the commitments included in their action plan, bearing in mind the Secretary-General's report."

Thirdly, Resolution 1539 from 2005 calls for urgent action to establish an effective monitoring and reporting system on the use of child soldiers and other abuses of children in armed conflicts. Resolution 1612 gives specific directions for this monitoring and reporting mechanism. The focus is on country-level collection of information by UN country teams, working in co-operation with national governments and civil society actors. Timely information is to be provided to a working group of the Security Council, that will review progress made and recommend appropriate action to be taken against perpetrators by either the Security Council or relevant bodies within the UN system. Resolution 1612 calls for this mechanism to be applied first to a number of parties and situations already on the Security Council agenda, as identified in the Secretary-General's report, and then extending it to other parties named in the report but not presently on the Security Council agenda.

Resolution 1612 refers repeatedly to the role of small arms in the violations of the rights of children. The preamble notes a grave concern about the "documented links" between the use of child soldiers and the illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons and stresses the need for "all States to take measures to prevent and to put an end to such trafficking." Paragraph nine reaffirms the provisions of Resolution 1539 for using targeted measures such as a ban on the export and supply of small arms and other military assistance to parties who violate international laws for the protection of children. Paragraph 16 urges member states, UN agencies, and regional

small arms are regularly used to abuse the rights of children

organizations, "to take appropriate measures to control illicit sub-regional and cross-border activities harmful to children, including illicit exploitation of natural resource, illicit trade in small arms," and other factors that contribute to the abuse of children.

The needs of children have been addressed in three of the four Security Council Presidential statements on small arms since the 2001 Conference. The 2005 statement does include a reference to the "special needs of child soldiers and women" in its recommendation for "comprehensive international and regional approaches" to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs.

In his 2005 report on small arms, the Secretary General recommended including provisions for the DDR of children in broader programs. In particular, the report said, "In fact, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration operations are more likely to succeed if rigorous measures are in place to curb linkages between illicit trade in natural and other resources, illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons, cross-border abduction and recruitment and armed conflicts. Moreover, provisions regarding disarmament, demobilization and reintegration should continue to address not only the political and security aspects, but also the social and economic aspects, especially the needs of former combatants, including women and children, and of receiving communities."²

²Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on "Small arms" (S/2005/69, 17 February 2005), <http://disarmament.un.org/cab/salw-sggarep.htm>

Progress at the regional level

There is a growing interest in cross-border dimensions of movement of children and the resultant involvement in conflict. This has been one of the reasons for UN Security Council engagement. At the regional level, the inclusion of children in small arms initiatives has been included in specific processes. In just one example, the African Conference on the Implementation of the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms: Needs and Partnerships, held in Pretoria, South Africa, March 18-21, 2002 identified the need for attention to the specific needs of children in government statements, sub-regional workshops, and plenary sessions. The Conference Report identifies as a common need, “the reduction of availability and demand through (among other measures) rehabilitation and reintegration assistance for demobilized soldiers, ex-combatants and, in particular, child soldiers.”³ In addition, it identifies as a need, “the reduction of the impact of arms availability on vulnerable groups.”⁴ ECOWAS and the Great Lakes Initiative are also addressing small arms within their regions and include initiatives to engage youth.

In addition, the 2003 Consolidated Report of the Secretary-General on Small Arms (A/58/207) highlights the efforts of the Office of the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict to support a research project on the impact of small arms on children by an international research network hosted by the Social Science Research Council in New York. This project is slated to include regional workshops, in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Regional and national workshops have also been held on Children and Small Arms and a focus on children has been included in the work of several NGOs at regional and national levels as part of efforts to implement the PoA.

Progress at the national level

While states inherently recognize the need to include children in their small arms work, few actually do so. However at the January 2006 PrepCom, states made nine references to youth in their statements and debates.⁵ In addition, some states are incorporating child-focused programming into their broader strategies to combat the illicit small arms trade. For example, in Sierra Leone, children have been included in DDR programs. In 2003, when the DDR programs formally ended in Sierra Leone, the Office of the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict reported that, “since May 2001, close to 7,000 child ex-combatants have been demobilized, 97 per cent of whom have now been reunified with their families and communities.”⁶

In addition, national law has linked the use of child soldiers and arms transfers. For example, after assault weapons that had been produced in Belgium were discovered in countries using child soldiers in Africa during the 1990s, Belgium passed a national law preventing such sales. A 2003 amendment to a 1991 law regulating the small arms trade, “banned licenses for exports to countries ‘where it has been established that child soldiers are aligned with the regular army,’” applying to countries using child soldiers under the age of 16.⁷ However, this applies only to child soldiers in the regular army, when, in fact, many armed children belong to armed groups and violent gangs.

³ Conference Report, paragraph 15.7

⁴ Conference Report, paragraph 15.8

⁵ David Jackman and Marin O’Brien, “A Clear Step Forward: Attention to Demand Issues at the PrepCom on Small Arms,” Quaker United Nations Office, January 2006.

⁶ <http://www.un.org/special-rep/children-armed-conflict/PressReleases/PR2003-02-28-OSRSG-PR03-11.html>

⁷ http://www.child-soldiers.org/document_get.php?id=891

Key challenges

While the nexus between children and small arms is clear, states are just beginning to consider how they can include youth-focused elements in small arms policy and programmatic initiatives. In addition, the international policy community often lumps children's issues with gender and women's issues, mistakenly conflating the different small arms issues that confront women and children as separate populations. The consequences of small arms that affect youth are unique and require child-specific policies to address them. Thus, countries must take the special needs and considerations of children into account when developing and implementing a small arms action plan.

Recommendations:

1. Specific strategies to co-ordinate implementation of the PoA with implementation of Security Council Resolution 1612.

In a series of successive resolutions on children and armed conflict, the Security Council explicitly mandates that the international community move from hortatory statements to the use of action plans in specific situations where children are used in and particularly victimized by armed conflict. Resolution 1612, for example, names 11 specific situations and 54 parties to undergo careful scrutiny. Information on the role of small arms in these specific situations and how they are used by the specific parties named must be collected and reported, and action strategies implemented in compliance with the provisions in Resolution 1612.

small arms initiatives must address the special needs of children

2. Banning the supply of arms to countries and groups violating the rights of children, particularly those that use child soldiers.

UN Security Council Resolutions 1460, 1539, and 1612 provide mandates for strengthening the use of targeted embargoes and sanctions against armed groups and security forces that misuse small arms in violation of the rights and security of children. Resolution 1612 names six specific violations of the rights of children, to which the misuse of small arms may have a contributing factor. In addition, national laws should be strengthened to prevent small arms transfers to violators and to prohibit parties that use child soldiers from receiving military assistance. Similarly, when there is a risk that small arms will be diverted to children, small arms transfers should be prohibited.

3. Inclusion of specific provisions for youth in the development of DDR standards and programs.

Children have special needs during demobilization and reintegration and therefore should not be included with adult counterparts when released from conflict obligations. In particular, the impacts of small arms on children's development and well-being must be taken into consideration and alternatives to soldiering provided. Such programs must pay special attention to girl soldiers and provide education, healthcare, and housing. Children also require special care and attention to address the psychological effects that come with being victims or perpetrators of small arms related violence. UN Security Council Resolution 1539 calls for implementation of the good practices outlined in the Secretary General's 2003 Report to the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict. The guidelines include provisions relating to small arms and highlight the importance of programs designed specifically with and for youth in order to be effective.

4. Additional action-oriented research and data collection on the comprehensive effects of small arms on children.

Efforts to collect data on the myriad effects of small arms proliferation and misuse have been ad hoc and infrequent. As such, extensive efforts must be made to further quantify the impact of small arms on children and to determine best practices and priorities for minimizing the devastation of these weapons. For example, surveys of post-conflict areas should include questions about levels of gun violence among children, the perceived threat that guns pose to a community, and the ways in which they are used. In addition, hospitals should keep and collect thorough data on gun injuries among children.

5. Inclusion of child-focused strategies in small arms awareness and education programs for field workers and the populations they serve.

Several organizations have begun to implement policies addressing the role of small arms in their assistance programs and fieldwork, but this practice has not been universalized. National governments, regional organizations, and international agencies must work with community-based organizations to assess the most effective ways to reduce the negative impacts of small arms. In addition, youth participation and a focus on youth needs must be integral parts of demand-reduction programs. The IANSA Youth Network is a platform for such participation at the global level. In addition, links between the focal points on small arms programs and policies and child protection networks are essential to comprehensively implementing the PoA. Further, approaches and responses geared at rehabilitating war-affected children should be coordinated among the various donors and agencies that are involved in these issues. With improved linkages and communications, the flow of small arms can be better monitored and addressed, and their impacts mitigated. Overall, implementation of the PoA will be more successful with the inclusion and engagement of youth populations.