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Actually I would very broadly agree with what Kiflemariam said, and also the analysis made by David about the failure of the social and political structures, collapse of the state system, to provide security to citizens.

If we look into our situation in South Asia - Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka - and if we first look at who are the users, then you may go into the relation with the demand situation. For instance, in one of our studies it's been seen that 60% of the users of small arms, legal or illegal, belongs to political parties. They include political party operatives, those are involved in political violence, and similar kind of thing. Besides, 30% of the users belong to organized crime syndicates, who are involved in drug trafficking, human trafficking, the consumer goods trafficking and arms trafficking. These organized crime syndicates are also very deeply linked to the political system. One way or other, they are supported, nurtured and harbored by political parties and political groups. Only 10% of the users belong to the ordinary criminal groups. So, the statistics gives a kind of reflection that the political system itself is very highly corrupt and violent - and they actually patronize this violent trend in the society.

We have observed through our studies that there are three pull factors and three push factors that create the demand situation for illegal use of small arms and subsequent violence. The three pull factors are (i) power - in this case arms mean power. Whether you are living in a slum, in a posh area, or in a middle class area - either in urban or rural area - and you have arms or you possess arms, that is a symbol of extra power, power that enables you to dominate others; (ii) Money - arms brings you money, because, the arms are involved in criminal activity that generate income for you. Money primarily gets you out of financial hardship and at the same time extra money bring you influence over others; (iii) Political status - once you have power and money, eventually you get a political status, because then you become a very hotcake for the political parties to go after and to get you on their own side. So, power, money and political status, those are the three pull factors that work in the situation of growing use of illegal firearms and violence.

And the three push factors that worsen the demand situation. These are poverty and unemployment; poor law and order situation; and failure of the judicial system to punish those involved in use of illegal firearms and violence. There is a huge poverty and
unemployment situation in south Asia, particularly in Bangladesh. There are hundreds and thousands of people; they don’t have any employment, nowhere to go, no food. In this situation, if they get an arm and get involved in that kind of criminal activities, they get food; they get money; they get status. So, very easily they are allured by crime syndicates - political crime syndicates as well - to get involved in armed activities. Then the poor law and order situation that aggravates the susceptibility to violence. The police and other security mechanisms are ineffective. They cannot ensure security to the citizens, to the society. So, I don’t know whether my son or daughter going to school will be able to come back home before they are killed or hijacked by armed groups. The police generally do nothing to protect you. They are very reluctant to record a complaint. If you want to record a simple general diary with the police yet it is not so easy. For taking complaints for formal case they wait for green signals from higher authorities or from political leaders. You have no chance to lodge a case if there is no green signal in your favor. If you are able to lodge a complaint to the police after an occurrence, then the police will put you and your family in frequent hassle in the name of inquiry and interrogation rather than going after the criminals. Therefore, if I go to the police that becomes another harassment for me. So, this kind of poor law and order situation creates a tremendously strong sense of insecurity within a person in a situation of growing armed violence. This paradox leads to a situation where ordinary citizens tend to procure illegal firearms for self-protection or seek protection from illegal arms users. On the other hand, failure of the judicial system to punish those involved in use of illegal firearms and violence also work as another push factor. If the violent criminals and illegal arms users are at all caught by the police or brought to justice, the judicial system fails to punish them. So, they just get out. Police just catch them today, within a week they are out on the street and they are coming back to you to take revenge because you complained to the police. So these are the kind of push factors that actually enhance the insecurity and at the same time the demand situation.

As I mentioned, there are smuggling syndicates and crime syndicates that are engaged in trafficking in drugs, human beings, consumer goods, and even arms. These are very lucrative businesses. This is not limited within one country or within its own borders. Understandably, this has a very strong regional and cross-border international linkage. Drug traffickers, human traffickers, arms traffickers, all of them have linkages starting from Europe to the Far East; from Middle East to the Latin America. These are very strong international networks that a single country cannot effectively fight them, contain them, or undo within its own borders, because the major part of this network is outside the border of one particular country. That is a very difficult situation for state governments. Even if they take some initiative to address this problem, often they end up in a failure, because the situation is of a cross-border, regional, and international nature that you cannot fight alone within your own borders.

At the same time, what we can see of the measures taken by governments for disarmament in our region are also very ineffective. Like, they try to collect arms. Very
often we see that they collect the unusable ones, disordered ones, that cannot be used. Sometimes we can see the arms buybacks. In our observation, buying back arms is totally a waste of money. You buy only the disordered ones, the rotten ones, you don’t get the sophisticated and usable good ones. Then, sometimes there are general amnesties. Also we can see that only crude, locally made guns are surrendered under the amnesty but sophisticated modern guns do not come to the government. Also, on occasions we see that there is a tightening of the laws, a toughening of the legal mechanism, but it doesn’t seem to be very effective. Also, there are agreements for ending armed conflicts, like in our country, Bangladesh. We had an agreement between the government and the insurgents in the tribal region of Chittagong Hill Tracts. But also there were the opposition groups who were opposed to the agreement. Then, after the agreement, those that signed the agreement did not get enough attention from the government in terms of rehabilitation, in terms of integration, in terms of support. So, again there remained the poverty, unemployment, despair and frustration that gradually are helping increase in support for the party that is opposed to the peace agreement. They are gaining ground these days.

So the question is, how do we ensure effective disarmament, reintegration and rehabilitation? To me it seems that, the overall disarmament, reintegration, and rehabilitation need to be looked into from a comprehensive point of view – and also it should not be only the duty of one country to address this problem. There should be regional cooperation and regional understanding, particularly in South Asia. In South Asia we have a tremendous mutual mistrust among the countries. Take the fight in Kashmir. To India it is one thing, and to Pakistan it is a separate thing. So in our region, there are tremendous disagreements, mutual mistrust, and varied definitions of the same thing. I don’t know that, rather I have no idea yet, as to how we are going to address these differences. But what I can say is that we can begin with some kind of regional dialogue, regional engagement that eventually may lead to a situation where we can feel confident about each other and really move forward to address these problems. I would like to stop here. Thank you.