

# Aiming for



# Prevention

## Conference Report

**Preparatory Committee, 2nd Session, UN  
Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and  
Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, January 8-19,  
2001**

Governments in recent years have begun various efforts to control small arms, especially as they relate to crime and insurgency, through increased coordination of export and licensing policies, customs controls, and police intelligence. In this vein, IPPNW participated in the UN "Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects" held in July 2001. The purpose of the conference was to decide on steps nations should take to prevent the illicit trade in small arms.

Non-governmental organizations, under the umbrella of the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), of which IPPNW is a founding member, along with other groups, took a prominent role in the conference, presenting evidence on the difficulty in separating legal and illegal transfers, and calling for tough controls on both state and non-state weapons sellers. The result of the 2001 conference was a "Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects." The Programme of Action includes calls to combat the small arms trade simultaneously from both a supply and demand perspective, and to develop and support action-oriented research.

## Overview

Governments met from 8-19 January to discuss the range of control measures that should come out of the July 2001 UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. In a generally cooperative atmosphere, government delegates suggested revisions to the draft "Program of Action" presented by the conference Chairman, Ambassador dos Santos of Mozambique.

While governments debated the measures necessary for controlling illicit trade, NGOs called for increased attention to the control of licit, or legal, trade including aspects such as domestic gun use, commercial sales, and government-to-government exports. Though a number of governments are sympathetic to the NGO coalition -- the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) -- the draft Program fell short of the comprehensive approach that NGOs are urging.

## **NGO Involvement Improves**

NGO access to this second PrepCom was drastically improved over the first one a year ago. Nearly all the official plenaries were open to observers from the public, as opposed to last year's closed sessions, and many delegations spoke positively of meaningful NGO involvement in the process. NGOs and diplomats shared information in panel discussions, informal briefings, and book launches held at or near the UN.

NGOs were granted a 3-hour bloc in which to present their views -- a crucial opportunity to educate the convened delegates about NGOs and their credibility as partners in the process of small arms control. NGOs scrambled to organize 25 5-minute presentations. IPPNW presented a statement on the health impacts of small arms and urged a range of controls. The presentation was drafted by staff members Brian Rawson and Merav Datan and presented to delegates by Cathey Falvo, MD, MPH.

Despite this, the specific role for NGOs in future official proceedings is uncertain. The conference postponed decisions about accrediting NGOs to the future PrepCom and July conference. It is expected that NGO access will resemble the arrangement for the NPT Review Conference of April 2000.

## **IPPNW'S Role: Current and Future**

### **IPPNW Establishes Its Role Within IANSA as Advocate for the Public Health Approach**

Within the small-arms-control community, IPPNW established itself as a useful partner and an advocate for public health approaches to the small arms problem. Delegates and NGO partners expressed interest in IPPNW and PSR-Finland's conference "Aiming for Prevention: International Medical Conference on Small Arms, Gun Violence, and Injury," to be held in Helsinki, September 2001. In addition, Victor W. Sidel, MD gave a brief presentation to a delegates' luncheon organized by the Hague Appeal for Peace, Cathey Falvo presented IPPNW's statement to government delegates, and Brian Rawson chaired an NGO panel on the health impacts of small arms. Contact was made and relationships fostered with such health and humanitarian organizations as WHO, UNICEF, SAFER-Net, Oxfam, the Small Arms Survey, and individual doctors, all of whom are working on the small arms issue.

There is a need for groups like IPPNW to bring the medical message to the next UN meetings. Where political will is flagging, the stark picture of human suffering will provide motivation. NGOs have not yet emphasized this message, instead focusing on technical policy recommendations. Testimonies from survivors, first-hand accounts from physicians, and photographs should

be delivered to the next PrepCom, from 19-30 March 2001, and the actual conference, from 9-20 July, 2001. Both will be in New York.

### **Medical Report on Small Arms**

IPPNW already plans to distribute a report in March, with a followup in July on the medical effects of small arms. IPPNW will team up with SAFER-Net, a Canada-based NGO linking health to firearms control, to produce the report. It will summarize the latest findings of medical research and epidemiological studies on small arms, make a case for greater involvement of the health sector in the UN Program of Action on small arms, and give policy recommendations based on existing medical research.

### **Health Concerns in Government Action Plans**

The UN Program of Action should recognize the importance of the health sector, call for its involvement, and encourage financial assistance to medical projects related to small arms. The current draft of the Program does not include such language. IPPNW is in contact with the WHO in regard to working with specific governments to draft and introduce such language.

### **Connecting NGO Communities**

IPPNW should help strengthen NGO presence at the UN conferences by bringing together different branches of civil society concerned with arms. The health and humanitarian sector is not fully connected with the small arms issue. Also, domestic gun control movements in the US and other countries are not yet connected with the international movement. This connection is important not only for political clout, but also for driving home the message that domestic gun regulations are essential to controlling the international illicit trade in small arms. Because of IPPNW's federation structure, it is well positioned to make these connections.

## **Political Issues**

### **A brief synopsis of some of the key debates**

Governments debated some contentious issues during the recent PrepCom, and NGOs voiced their own concerns. A number of reports, documents, and analyses are available from the [IANSA website](#). The website for the UN Department of Disarmament Affairs contains additional documents.

### **Defining "Illicit" Trade**

What constitutes "illicit trade" in small arms? Governments agree that criminals and insurgents should not trade in arms, nor should countries under a UN arms embargo. But they disagree as to whether restrictions should apply to forms of "legal" trade such as commercial sales both domestic and international, government-to-government transfers, and other grey areas such as arms brokers (the middlemen who exploit lax regulations in certain

countries to redirect arms toward illicit buyers). NGOs argue that such legal forms of trade must be controlled.

### **Defining "Small Arms"**

What constitutes "small arms?" The current draft Program of Action applies the term small arm only to military specification weapons. This leaves out a whole range of handguns, firearms, police gear and sport-weapons that are not designed specifically for military use. NGOs argue that these arms are responsible for a major portion of small arms violence, and should be included in current negotiations.

### **Binding Measures or Political Commitments?**

Will the UN Program of Action be an expression of political commitments or legally binding measures? The measures in the Program will express the intentions of states, but will most likely be non-binding. The UN deals in customary norms as much as enforceable laws (the signs in the cafeteria say "Smoking Discouraged" rather than "Smoking Prohibited.") With small arms, political commitments have had some success -- examples are the EU Code of Conduct limitations on arms exports and the West African ECOWAS voluntary moratorium on arms imports. This global expression of detailed norms and political commitments would be a significant achievement, though non-binding.

### **New Infrastructure?**

Should new agencies be created to oversee the control of illicit arms trade? Should power be centered at the national, regional, or international level? States are wary of encroachments on their sovereignty, and many prefer to restrict information-sharing and policy coordination to the regional level. Some states disapprove of increasing bureaucracies.