1. BACKGROUND

Armed violence has been recognized as a health crisis and a threat to development, but the dimensions of the problem are either poorly understood or under appreciated.

For example, despite the comprehensive nature of the UN Programme of Action (UNPoA) on Small Arms and Light Weapons, implementation efforts around this have been rather narrowly focused on arms management issues.

The result has been a largely exclusive process, where the technical competencies of entire disciplines such as health, centrally important to the issue, have either not been leveraged or only supported by a minority of progressive donors.

Negotiations on the International Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) also generally ignore the huge health implications of the arms trade, although health is a critical aspect of such issues as safety, security, and sustainable social and economic development, all included in the “principles” of why we need an ATT.

Despite these obstacles, health organizations have provided some of the most compelling testimony and rationale for why we need international and national frameworks to prevent armed violence, as well as recommendations for prevention strategies using an evidence-based approach.

2. OBJECTIVE

To identify and describe key health contributions to the discussion and negotiation of international agreements to prevent armed violence.

3. METHODS

Review contributions of health organizations including International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the American Public Health Association (APHA), to research, education and policy discussions on how armed violence affects public health.

4. RESULTS

Medical and public health organizations play a vital role in strengthening arguments for global arms control by:

- Quantifying health, humanitarian costs of armed violence.
  
  **Examples:**
  - IPPNW has presented at the UN and other policy meetings on the health consequences of armed violence via “One Bullet Story” cases, as well as quantitative research from hospital-based surveillance.
  - ICRC presents policy papers at UN meetings on disarmament about the humanitarian dimensions of arms use in conflict zones. Here they present at a ATT meeting on their report “Healthcare in danger: making the case.”
  - The American Public Health Association has passed many resolutions over the years supporting efforts to regulate or ban a range of weapon systems including nuclear, chemical, biological and conventional weapons.
  - WHO’s 2002 World Report on Violence and Health made the following one of its nine priority recommendations: “to seek practical, internationally agreed responses to the global arms trade and the global arms trade.”

- Calling for policy changes based on health considerations.
  
  **Examples:**
  - WHO report to the UN Conference on the Illicit Trade In Small Arms And Light Weapons in July 2001, Small Arms and Global Health. It detailed how the “scale of small arms death and injury, and their concomitant impact on societies, is huge.”

WHO World Report on Violence and Health Priority Recommendation #9:

“to seek practical, internationally agreed responses to the global drugs trade and the global arms trade.”

- Showi policy makers that the worldwide medical community supports armed violence prevention measures including controls on trade and use of arms.
  
  **Examples:**
  - IPPNW doctor from Nigeria presents Medical Alert for a Strong ATT health signatures from 58 countries to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.
  - Researching how to improve best practices for victim assistance, an important aspect of most treaties and agreements.
  
  **Example:**
  - IPPNW medical students from Austria train to participate in Zambia victim assistance research project at Lusaka hospital.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Public health and medical organizations play a crucial role in helping to inform policy makers about the health and humanitarian consequences of armed violence. Development agencies should invest in supporting the research, education and advocacy on armed violence by this important constituency.