

# **Building Linkages in campaign on Small Arms and Light Weapons**

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### **Introduction**

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address this important workshop. My task is to share with you the topic on *Building linkages in the campaign on Small Arms and Light Weapons*. In this paper, I will explore the current status of SALW in the Africa and specifically in GLR, existing international and regional instrument on the fight against SALW, obstacle to achieving a free arms and light weapon region. I will then embark on the need for fostering campaign against SALW at national and regional levels, the necessary institutional and state linkages as well as the way forward in the campaign to combating, controlling and management of proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

### **The Status of small arms and light weapons in the Great Lakes region**

The issue of illegal possession and usage small arms and light weapons may not be entirely new to us. The economies of most countries of this region have been adversely affected by ready availability and misuse of these arms. Global figures put the estimated figures of small arms and light weapons in circulation at 640 million. 60% of them are held by civilians. Majority of these guns are used and abused in Africa. All actors in conflict, government, military, militias, armed opposition and civilians use Small Arms and Light weapons. Most victims of gun violence in Great Lakes are young men who have the highest earning potential and whose lose is felt keenly in economic terms. These weapons have also been used for gender based and sexual violence and their availability places women and girls at an increased risk for severe injury or death during an assault. Containing the proliferation of Small Arms Light weapons in Great Lakes region is proving to be a challenging task.

A number of factors could be cited as contributing to spread of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Great Lakes Region. These are the same exacerbating factors that complicate small arms management processes. One of the key issues is the existence of a thriving illegal market through which guns can be sold. This is largely due to the fact that most countries in this region are either unstable or recovering from civil wars. There is also the issue of unequal accesses to rights and resources. This, coupled with poverty and economic stagnation, leads to scramble for few and less sustaining resources. The rise of militia groups and informal youth movements has also contributed significantly to the availability of small arms in illegal hands. Such groups often claim to be protecting the rights of the marginalized, deprived and disempowered communities. Hence such groups like as *Sungu Sungu* in Tanzania and *Mungiki* in Kenya pose great threat to small arms reduction.

### **Main instruments on small arms and light weapons control.**

A number of global and regional instruments for small arms management have been put in place. Some of these include:

- United Nations Programme of Action- This established a series of minimum standards that the state must consider, although it is not binding document. Adopted in July 2001.
- United Nations Fire Arm Protocol-This is a supplement to the United Nation convention against Trans-national organized crime and constitutes the first legally binding instrument for the regulation of small Arms Light Weapons. Adopted in July 2005.
- Nairobi protocol for the prevention, control and reduction of small Arms Light Weapons in Great Lakes Region and Horn of Africa. (2004).
- ECOWAS protocol on Small Arms Light weapons, their munitions and other related materials. (2006).
- Bamako Declaration of the Organization of African Union (2000).
- SADC Firearms protocol (2001).

### **Challenges facing the campaign on SALW-The missing links**

There are number of key missing links that have to be built in order to effectively tackle the proliferation and illicit trafficking of Small Arms and Light weapons as the comprehensive approach is vital. In general, it can be argued that there is a lack of awareness of arms dynamics in the region. For instance, the challenges associated with disarmament processes in Kenya and Uganda as well as demobilization and reintegration processes in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Another fundamental issue is that most national laws are weak and less harmonized to effectively manage the proliferation of small Arms. This situation combined with lack of adequate police capacity complicates the management of small arms and Light Weapons. The small number of police officers at the border points makes it difficult to control the inflow of Small Arms. This deficiency of capacity combined with poor pay and corruption needs to be addressed. Closely related to the above is the missing link in cross-border cooperation between the police forces, government officials and the local community. Cattle rustling have become a major conflict risk for the pastoral community in Kenya and Uganda. Raiding has implications for relations with neighboring states as warriors cross national borders in search of cattle and weapons. The poor mechanism for cross border cooperation between Kenyan and Ugandan governments mean that they are severely constrained in controlling the movement of armed groups and weapons.

The poor demilitarization and demobilization of former combatants is yet another problem to be addressed. The genocidal *Interahamwe* (Rwandan Hutu) militia subsequently regrouped in the refugee camps of Eastern Congo and resumed war in 1996 and 1998. The effective disarmament and reintegration of the *Interahamwe* and other armed groups in DRC is absolutely vital to the stability of the whole region. Also linked to this is the slow process of demobilization in Burundi.

The role of women in conflict resolution has largely been ignored by peace actors in the Great Lakes region. Women experience the consequences of small Arms violence on a daily basis in both conflict and non conflict situations. In addition, women are underrepresented in efforts to deal with aftermath of gun violence. While women are often victims of conflict, they also participate as combatants and in support roles, providing information, food, clothing and shelter to the combatants.

Campaigns on promotion of safe storage, collection and disposal of SALW are hardly conducted among the various peace actors and governments. It is hence critical to review the campaign approach in this regard. Many guns are currently in wrong hands due to poor storage and disposal.

### **Importance of building linkages in campaign on Small Arms and Light Weapons**

National and regional networks, both parliamentary and non parliamentary, are important structures for facilitating policy debates. They are also crucial in strengthening democracy and encouraging harmonization of policy formulation and implementation. Strategic linkages between Parliamentary groups and committee; and other civil society organisations groups need to be strengthened to ensure that Governments meet their commitments to guaranteeing peace and security. The networks create an environment for information exchange, experience sharing as well as giving the parliamentarians the much needed capacity for discussing and making proposals for action.

Within the circles of parliament, one of the key features of these networks is that in most cases they are independent of the routine control by national parliament and political party procedures. Due to strength in numbers and level of coverage, Parliamentary Networks and Forums build on the independence of Members in openly speaking about issues that affect their constituents, and which they believe other Members can support. An experience of the nature of such a linkage and network is in the Great Lakes Parliamentary Forum on Peace-AMANI Forum. The Forum, through its capacity building and network development programmes, has enabled parliamentarians to deeply understand their roles vis a vis the Executive and speak with higher authority on key issues of peace and security.

In the more developed countries, there exist virtual parliaments, where using development in information and communication technology, parliamentarians drawn from different countries have come together in informal as well as formal ways to exchange information, learn and create new policies without relying on face-to-face conferences and parliamentary forums.

### **Restructuring the campaign links on small arms and light weapons control**

In many contexts, armed violence is reaching epidemic proportions. What links can we then built or restructure to contain the proliferation of small arms light weapons? Small arms and light weapons cause violence more difficult to manage, more complex and more expensive in human and economic terms. The following are some of the campaign links that need to be developed in order to control the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

- Sensitization and awareness campaigns are currently exclusive to Non-governmental organizations. Parliamentarians can take lead in the SALW campaign through their legislative, oversight and representative roles. As the people's representative, parliamentarians have a unique position of setting good examples for the rest of the community.
- There is great need to link the government's effort and the media; the media can be used to ensure wider dissemination of messages that favour effective arms control.
- Education and awareness raising measures which addresses the risks and disadvantages of ownership and misuse of SALW within the framework of radio and television talk shows.
- Another good practice that Great Lakes Parliamentarians and leaders can adopt is the traditional cooperation with civil society and SALW specialist centres. This proposed broad cooperation can lead to speedy legislation and implementation of SALW laws. AMANI Forum as a regional organization of parliamentarians has been instrumental in cementing such linkages at national and regional levels.
- Women have taken leadership roles in organizing local and international seminars to highlight the dangers of gun violence; it is hence a priority to develop a solid link between the government and women community based groups advocating for SALW control. Women should be equally involved in the development and implementation of SALW control policies, violence prevention strategies and disarmament initiatives. Prioritize action-oriented research to increase knowledge about gender and armed violence.
- Demilitarization and demobilization processes need to be given more concerted approach, the soldiers alone can not succeed. It is hence important to involve the community and combine the demobilization programme with programmes that promote social development and economic opportunities for ex-combatants and their dependants.
- Effective co-operation between and within countries to tackle the Small Arms Light Weapons proliferation. This should be more particular in building a strong coordination between all government agencies. In realizing this goal, the national focal points on small arms and light weapons should be strengthened and targeted to engage other stakeholders with a role to play in Small Arms Control. In AMANI Forum for instance, we have established working relationships with a number parliamentary and non-parliamentary organisations to boost intervention mechanisms.
- It is the responsibility of national governments to control the flow and supply of SALW into and out of their countries. Governments should, as a matter of urgency, put in place reliable customs control at the border to combat illegal trafficking and regulate and restrict on arms movement. Such mechanisms that involve clear export criteria and prosecution of offenders can indeed reduce SALW proliferation. The Police force should be monitored and reforms enacted to improve their remuneration in order to combat corruption subsiding law enforcement.

- International organizations with sound policies on disposal of SALW can partner with the Great Lakes leaders in advocating and supporting measures for the environmentally sound destruction of surplus small Arms. Joint operation of collecting surplus and desirable stock of Arms is a measure the regional bodies should consider.

### **General Recommendation on SALW Campaign.**

To support the overall public education; awareness raising and strengthen linkages on control and management of small arms and light weapons, key stakeholders should adopt the following measures:

- Stakeholders must have deep interest and personal commitment to supporting all mechanisms of prevention and control of proliferation of small arms as part of peacebuilding and conflict resolution. This interest and commitment should not be to attending conferences and workshops but displayed among the constituents.
- Define missions and goals as well as guiding principles and benefits of such engagement. This can be enhanced by adopting common operational frameworks and protocols that will spell out the roles of each member.
- For effective deliberation and consensus building, stakeholders must build high level of trust among themselves. In parliamentary ways, this can be fostered by allowing Members to talk freely with one another and provide opportunity for building inter-personal networks. There have been cases where Honourable Members have been accused of perpetrating violence by mobilising their people to arm themselves and attack. These issues should be discussed openly and appropriate solutions found.
- Establish strong political and administrative leadership for the growth and development of the networks
- Establish reliable source of factual and useful information and expertise opinion necessary for effective intervention on all issues pertaining to prevention and control of proliferation of small arms.
- Ensure adequate follow up and conclusion on recommendations of all meetings and conferences. The Forums should also define tools and targets for such follow up procedures.
- Build partnerships and networks that allows for exchange of information on best practices and experiential learning. In AMANI Forum for instance, we have established working relationships with a number parliamentary and non-parliamentary organizations to boost intervention mechanisms.
- Key stakeholders should create a sense of ownership of the process as well as commitment to the vision. This increases credibility of the processes and creates transparency and accountability.

## **Conclusion**

In the past, efforts to contain the proliferation of Small Arms Light Weapons has not been advocated for as a typical peace policy task. The Great Lakes leaders should come up with sound policies aiming at supporting initiative to enhance transparency and rule of law during reforms of the police, military or the legal and penal frameworks.

It is also important to promote social cohesion, reconciliation and trust between and among communities. This should be in the context of involving the locals and identifying their various special needs. The government can support the local mediation by funding and training community elders in SALW control. Regional conflict prevention measures including early warning and early action should be promoted and fully supported by the government. The war on SALW control should also be spearheaded by specific Industries like Tourism sector which stands to benefit from effective control of Arms.

I would also like to stress on the issue of collective responsibility in search for peace in the region. Parliamentarians, as elected representatives, must also seek their rightful place in influencing issues of peace security, and in particular addressing the subject of small arms. This is the context within which such vibrant organizations like AMANI Forum were formed. Initiatives to establish and maintain regional and global networks would help in information exchange as well as tracing the transferability of arms and their ammunition. It will be easy thereafter to monitor the flow of illicit weapons across the region.

Finally, in a highly politicized environment like the one we operate in, policy actors and other stakeholders are bound to face challenges on their way to success. A Single parliamentarian or civil society organization cannot successfully finish the race. They need to come together to strengthen each other; critique each other, nationally and regionally.

I thank you! Asante sana!