

Statement of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on the Need for a Gender Perspective in the Text of the Arms Trade Treaty

Adopted on 24 July 2012 during the 52nd session

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (the “Committee”) recalls that the Preamble of the Convention on the Elimination Of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (“the Convention”) emphasizes the specific factors relating to armed conflict which hinder the enjoyment of substantive equality for women and reiterates the necessity for general and complete disarmament.

The Committee recalls that gender-based violence against women is a form of discrimination that seriously inhibits women's ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men. The Convention guarantees women the equal recognition, enjoyment and exercise of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field and on a basis of equality with men.

The Committee welcomes international efforts to negotiate a legally-binding Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) at the United Nations and recalls that the arms trade has specific gender dimensions and direct links to discrimination and gender-based violence against women with far-reaching implications for efforts to consolidate peace, security, gender equality and to secure development. The Committee urges Member States to recognize the potential gendered impacts of international transfers of arms especially illicit arms as women are disproportionately affected by armed gender-based violence.

Whether in conflict or post-conflict situations, conventional arms, especially small arms, including diverted arms from the legal trade, can have a direct or indirect effect on women as victims of conflict-related sexual violence, as victims of domestic violence and also as protestors or actors in resistance movements. In times of conflict, women are increasingly deliberately targeted for and subjected to various forms of violence and abuse ranging from arbitrary killings, torture and mutilation, sexual and gender-based violence, and these forms of violence persists even after the cessation of hostilities. The proliferation of arms and ammunition perpetuate and facilitate these atrocities.

To tackle violations of women’s human rights during conflict and promote participation in post-conflict reconstruction and policy making, actions must focus on prevention of conflict and all forms of violence. Such conflict prevention includes robust and effective regulation of the arms trade (ATT) as well as appropriate control over the circulation of existing and often illicit small arms.

The Committee urges that the ATT not merely focus on the procedural authorization of arms transfers. A strong ATT should have as its primary purpose the prevention of human suffering especially among women and children, caused by the proliferation and illicit trade of arms and ammunition so as to contribute to the development of more sustainable and stable security sectors.

The Committee urges that language to prevent gender-based violence against women including rape and other forms of sexual violence through the control of arms and restrictions on international transfers, be included in all three parts of the ATT, namely the Preamble, the Goals and Objectives and the Criteria section.
