

## **Survivors of Gun Violence: Strengthening the UN PoA**

Thursday 12 May 2011

Conference Room 1, 1.15pm – 2.45pm

IANSA and the Permanent Mission of Luxembourg to the UN

Speaker: Guerda Benjamin, OFAT Haiti

Diplomats, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the survivors of sexual violence in Haiti.

The earthquake of January 2010 devastated my country. The UN Secretary General said it is, "One of the biggest natural disasters and the most serious."

Many of those who survived become internally displaced, exposed to violence and serious human rights abuses.

Like other countries, correct information on legal and illegal small arms, and gun death and injury, is hard to collect.

But the exact numbers are less important than the fact that small arms are an under-mining force in Haiti.

They are available to various factions and private armies, and criminal gangs, and civilians.

The mis-use of small arms has led to more criminal activity and human rights abuses, particularly sexual violence, after the earthquake.

Service providers and human rights organisations have documented hundreds of cases of sexual violence since the earthquake.

They report that rape and other forms of gender based violence are very high.

According to a recent survey by the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice at NYU School of Law:

- The majority of these victims (86%) are women and girls. Men and boys account are about 14% of victims.
- Most sexual assault victims were women in their early twenties. A number were teenage girls.

Even though sexual violence was already wide-spread in Haiti before the earthquake, internal displacement and the living conditions in camps have created a bigger risk for women and girls.

They lost their homes are doing their best to support their families.

But these women face the constant fear of sexual assault and other forms of gender based violence.

Haiti follows an international pattern.

The risk of physical harm, and intimidation to women increases when a gun is present in their homes and communities.

- In 2010 and the first quarter of 2011, sixty-one (61) women and girls were killed by gunshot;
- From January to March 2011, five hundred and nine (509) people were killed by gunshot in the metropolitan area of Port au Prince. Of these twelve (12) were police officers. Ten (10) other policemen were wounded.

We must remember that each statistic represents a life.

Each person left behind a family, friends and community who miss them.

To most Haitians, the connection between recovery from the earthquake and gun violence against women has been forgotten in the response to the humanitarian crisis.

The international community is assisting Haiti in reconstruction and recovery.

But we also need to use this opportunity to develop and implement national laws and frame-works to regulate gun ownership and mis-use.

This includes controls and effective sanctions for non compliance, and should include links to the implementation of the Programme of Action.

Now is also the time to integrate the gender dimension and for attention to be given to the needs of women and girls in the Programme of Action in accordance with the Gender Guide-lines, and in all aspects of the reconstruction of Haiti.

The new government must also make the protection of women and girls a priority, not only in camps.

It must implement a comprehensive plan to improve the safety of women and girls which recog-nises the specific impacts of gun violence upon them.

The government must also continue to work with the international community and civil society to support victims and survivors, to prevent gender based violence.

For example, in a programme led by the International Rescue Committee, women survivors of sexual and physical violence have received training to support others in camps in Haiti.

These women are resource people and learned how to listen and communicate about gender-based violence. They learned how to provide psycho-logical and social support, and how to refer survivors of sexual violence to services.

They have also im-plemented out-reach activities and campaigns. They hold weekly mini-trainings so that women are in touch.

This is a clear example of how women work together as mentioned by Mewael in her speech today.

Today I have called attention to the fact that women are particularly vul-nerable to sexual violence and intimidation at gun-point.

We know that even when women are not directly targeted by gun violence, they and their children deal with social, economic and emotional impacts.

But women are not just passive victims of gun violence: they are survivors.

They are care-givers, peace-makers and activists for change.

They are part of a network of survivors of gun violence.

They are involved in different types and levels of advocacy on armed violence prevention.

They promote the rights of survivors including in the UN small arms process, and have an important part to play as we think about the Review Conference in 2012.

Thank you.