

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This monograph presents an overview of how gender language is used at meetings and in documents of various United Nations (UN) fora on the topic of small arms and light weapons (SALW). The monograph begins with an overview of relevant definitions and the emergence on the global agenda of norms on SALW and gender mainstreaming at the United Nations. The authors then scan statements from official meetings and documents from the Security Council and the General Assembly from 2001–2003, as well as the 2001 SALW Conference and the Biennial Meeting of States on SALW in 2003. A list of ‘gender reference indicators’ is used to assess the frequency and context of references, and to evaluate points of convergence and divergence between international norms on gender and SALW.

The authors conclude that UN debates on SALW do not yet address gender in the SALW context in a way that encompasses the differing social, economic and political effects of these weapons on men and women. The final section of the monograph offers concluding observations and some recommendations in anticipation of the 2006 Review Conference on Small Arms and Light Weapons.

Observations

- The evolution of norms on gender and SALW at the UN occurs in cycles, through a lengthy process of consensus-building.
- Gender mainstreaming is more than a theory; it has material implications for the implementation activities of the UN.
- Although non-governmental organizations and member states have an inter-dependent relationship at the UN, they have varying constraints in how they deal with these issues, resulting in differences in approach.

Recommendations

- Experts on the gender perspectives relevant to small arms and light weapons should engage in education and awareness-raising exercises with representatives of member states well in advance of UN meetings on SALW.
- The gap between those who have gender expertise and those who make policy on SALW can be bridged through focused workshops, seminars and dialogues that encourage a common understanding of this issue.
- If messages on gender and small arms from gender experts, civil society, UN specialized agencies and interested member states are co-ordinated and streamlined, they are more likely to make an impact.
- Analysis of the agenda-setting value of UN meetings and documents should be complemented by the monitoring and evaluation of the effect that gender mainstreaming has on the implementation of UN activities on SALW.
- The 2006 Review Conference on Small Arms and Light Weapons represents a golden opportunity for NGOs, UN agencies and gender experts to insist on the inclusion of gender language on SALW in statements and outcome documents. In this way they will better reflect the needs, experiences and perspectives of both men and women.