

# Small Arms and Women

## **Small arms have devastating impacts on women because:**

- **Women experience the consequences of small arms violence on a daily basis in both conflict and non-conflict situations**
- **Women are disproportionately the victims of small arms violence compared with their role as gun owners and users**
- **Women are underrepresented in efforts to deal with the aftermath of gun violence**

Every year thousands of women are shot, traumatised, intimidated, and raped at gunpoint around the world. While men are more likely to make, sell, buy, own, or use small arms, and are more likely to be killed or physically injured by them (men are the victims in over 90 percent of firearm homicides), the damage that women suffer from the availability and misuse of guns is disproportionate to their role as owners or users of these weapons.

Women and girls suffer many different negative effects from the threat and misuse of small arms. For example, in conflict and post-conflict zones such as Afghanistan, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, sexual violence, used as a weapon of war, occurs at the barrels of guns. Women and girls as young as ten have been abducted at gunpoint from their homes. In addition, women and children fleeing conflict make up the majority of internally displaced people and refugees. In refugee camps, which should be places of safety, many women and girls are routinely gang raped and abused. In the Dadaab refugee camp in Northern Kenya, for example, 75 percent of reported rapes and sexual assaults occurred at the hands of armed assailants.

While women are often victims of conflict, they also participate as combatants and in support roles, providing information, food, clothing and shelter. In conflict zones, women often become the main providers for their devastated families, and bear the long-term burden of caring for the sick and injured, because of the diminished adult male population. However,

despite their many roles during and after conflicts, women are frequently excluded from post-conflict decision-making and disarmament and demobilisation processes. In Sierra Leone, although women were estimated to have made up more than 12 percent of total fighting forces, they only represented 6.5 percent of demobilized fighters, 84 percent of which were men.

Women are also victims of gun violence in non-conflict zones. Women are much more likely to be shot by someone they know well, using a legally held weapon, than by an anonymous assailant. Half of the women who are killed each year by firearms are killed by an intimate partner, and a woman increases her chances of being killed by an intimate partner by 50 percent when she owns a gun.

Women have taken leadership roles in organizing locally, nationally, regionally and internationally to highlight the dangers of gun violence and to campaign for legislative change. Despite these efforts, women are still underrepresented in decision-making processes. One step forward has been the UN Security Council's Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security—passed in October 2000—which provides a platform for women's voices to be heard in war zones and in the aftermath of armed conflict.