



13 September 2019

Statement to UN Human Rights Council 42nd session (9 - 27 September 2019)

Item 3: Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development. General Debate

Statement on the OHCHR report on firearms

The OHCHR report on the “Impact of civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms on civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights” (A/HRC/42/21) illustrates ways in which civilian access to firearms, including lawfully acquired weapons, have a negative impact on human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights.

The report rightly states that it is imperative to also consider non-regulatory measures when discussing ways to reduce the impact of civilian access to firearms on human rights, including by fully addressing the larger social, cultural and economic factors driving firearm violence.¹ Indeed, addressing and preventing the acquisition, possession, transfer and use of firearms necessitates an understanding of gendered root causes of violent behaviour, and the recognition that bringing about changes in masculinities and gender norms is an effective tool for the prevention of human rights violations and conflict more broadly.²

¹ See, for example, paragraphs 45 and 46 of the report:

“45. While regulatory measures are an essential and effective measure for reducing the risks inherent in civilian access to firearms, they are not always successful on their own because they do not fully address the larger social, cultural and economic factors driving firearm violence. Additionally, regulatory measures often meet stiff resistance in States where many individuals feel that gun ownership is at the heart of personal and national identity while also being crucial for personal security.

46. For these reasons, it is imperative to also consider non-regulatory measures when discussing ways to reduce the impact of civilian access to firearms on human rights. Several submissions received from States and other stakeholders set forth suggestions for non-regulatory measures that may reduce the impact of civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms on human rights. These submissions resoundingly supported measures tailored to address the root causes of firearm violence perpetrated by civilians.”

² In this regard, it is worth recalling that the UN Secretary General’s *Agenda for Disarmament* acknowledges that “the concerns relating to arms have clear gender dimensions. The ownership and use of arms is closely linked to specific expressions of masculinity related to control, power, domination and strength.”

While we welcome that the report draws attention to the particular impact on the human rights of women, children, adolescents and members of ethnic minorities, we note that such analysis should have gone further by looking, for example, at the specific gendered impacts on men and boys, and persons of diverse and marginalised sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics. Moreover, further analysis should have been included to consider the economic and social impacts on women caused by non-lethal harm by firearms, such as the disproportionate impact on women in their often-predominant role as caregivers to the gunshot survivors with disabilities, or those who are seriously injured. These are some of the issues that WILPF had highlighted [in our submission to OHCHR for this report](#) which focussed on the *gendered* impacts on human rights of the acquisition, possession, and use of firearms. The submission is available on wilpf.org website.³ (LIMPAL (WILPF) Colombia also made a submission focussing on the human rights impacts of firearms in their country.)

Finally, WILPF reiterates the need to include gender-responsive perspective into any measure that seeks to address and curb the violations of human rights caused by firearms and other weapon systems. This requires the meaningful participation of women and LGBTIQ, feminist civil society organisations, survivors of armed violence and gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence, and experts on gender and small arms in any policies or education activities that seek to regulate the possession of firearms. We urge all states to heed the call of the UN Secretary General to “incorporate gender perspectives in the development of national legislation and policies on disarmament and arms control, including consideration of the gendered aspects of ownership, use and misuse of arms; the differentiated impacts of weapons on women and men; and the ways in which gender roles can shape arms control and disarmament policies and practices.”

³ https://www.wilpf.org/wilpf_statements/submission-to-a-report-on-the-impact-of-firearms-on-human-rights/