

# HRC26: Civilian Possession of Firearms and Its Impact on Women's Human Rights

11 June 2014

The Isla Vista recent mass killing is unfortunately not exceptional among cases in which firearms have been used in misogynist killings by a civilian. But firearms do not only affect women's right to life, they also affect many other civil, political and socioeconomic human rights of women.

## Guns and Femicide/Direct Killings

Studies show that there is a direct correlation between femicides rates and the use of firearms. Firearms were used in a third of all femicides worldwide, reaching 60% in some Latin American countries such as Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. In Ciudad Juárez, firearms were used in more than 80% of femicides[1].

Furthermore, firearms may also be involved in femicides as a way of intimidating the victim.

## Sexual Violence at Gunpoint

The correlation between high rates of sexual violence and flow of firearms has been demonstrated in countless examples. In DRC, where sexual violence has spread to the whole country owing to impunity and flow of firearms, women survivors of sexual violence have consistently reported they were intimidated with a gun.

The impact of the uncontrolled flow and widespread use of arms on women due to irresponsible and unregulated arms trade across borders resulted in the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) with a particular reference that exporting states need to assess the risk of their arms being used to commit gender-based violence (Art.7(4)). This includes of course any firearm.

## Domestic Violence

Moreover, in the context of domestic violence, guns often play the role of a threat or an intimidation rather than being directly used, which can be the case in many instances as well.

Where the ownership of guns by men is most often presented as a means to protect their family as part of their obligation to do so as men, Small Arms Survey find that "Firearms in the home similarly represent an increased risk to women as they are more likely to be used to threaten and inflict harm on family members rather than to protect the home from intruders." [2]

Furthermore, as the report by IRIN points out: "... the diffusion of small arms into communities, engenders a rise in intimate-partner violence. Even in non-conflict settings,

women are more likely to be attacked by a partner if a gun is available; in 2003 ‘The American Journal of Public Health’ found that access to a gun increased the likelihood of a woman being killed by her husband fivefold”[3].

In a study carried out in a region of Pakistan characterised by a high level of possession of firearms, it was found that women felt in danger not only because of gun violence but also because of physical abuse. This was linked to the presence of a gun as much as to patriarchy and gender stereotypes imposed on them[4].

#### Impact on Other Rights: Civil and Political Rights, Economic and Social Rights

With men almost always the bearers of guns, power imbalances between men and women are further distorted. The threat that firearms represent for women as described above both within the household and on the streets, to their lives, to their physical integrity and to their freedom is closely linked to the imposition of patriarchy.

When the threat of firearms is used to perpetrate a femicide, a rape or domestic violence, these are manifestations of gender discrimination and perpetrated to punish behaviours that deviate from the traditional stereotype imposed on women.

The implication is thus to restrict women’s ability to move freely, participate in the public sphere, carry out economic activities or engage in the political arena: all of these human rights that are to be protected without any discrimination on the basis of gender.

#### Guns and Negative Conceptions of Masculinity

Thus, while firearms themselves may not always be directly implicated in violence against women, they are correlated with an increase in gendered inequality and a generalised culture of violence against women. This is supported by Indian specific studies, which have found that patriarchy, gendered inequality (and segregation) and the socialisation of men and boys around displaying heterosexual prowess and exerting control over women are key determinants of violence. [5]

#### Recommendations in View of the Upcoming HRC Resolution:

- Control of firearms through relevant legislation, licencing, marking and tracing of weapons, record-keeping, etc.
- Acknowledgement of the varied gender impact of the use of firearms in all its aspects (in the house and outside, on the prevalence of sexual violence, on the participation of women and on their economical dependency)
- Recognition of the impact irresponsible and uncontrolled arms trade have on national proliferation and civilian firearm use and recommendation to ratify the ATT
- Correlation and coordination between the granting of arms permits and records of GBV
- Creation of monitoring mechanisms of arm advertising to eliminate all attempts to use misogyny or patriarchal conceptions as a means of merchandising weapons
- Education and awareness-raising among police, schools, and communities about the use of firearms in domestic violence and to commit acts of gender-based violence, including sexual violence.

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[1] Matthias Nowak, Femicide: A Global Problem Research Notes Armed Violence Number 14. Small Arms Survey, 2012.  
[http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/H-Research\\_Notes/SAS-Research-Note-14.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/H-Research_Notes/SAS-Research-Note-14.pdf)

[2] *ibid*

[3] IRIN, Guns Out of Control: The continuing threat of small arms, IRIN in Depth, 2006 <http://www.irinnews.org/pdf/in-depth/small-arms-irin-in-depth.pdf>

[4] Awaz Foundation Pakistan, Survey Report Disarming Domestic Violence Campaign 2009. Supported by IANSA.  
<http://awazcds.org.pk/Downloads/rstudies/Survey%20Report%20Disarming%20Domestic%20Violence%20Campaign%202009.pdf>

[5] Sharna De Lacy, More arms than Mahishasura, WILPF and CAFI, 2014