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## **Submission to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)**

**Report on the “impact of the civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms and the underlying root causes and risk factors driving firearms-related violence on the right to participate in cultural life and the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs”**

**(HRC resolution 56/9, 11 July 2024)**

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## Introduction

This is a submission to the report “on the impact of the civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms and the underlying root causes and risk factors driving firearms-related violence on the right to participate in cultural life and the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs” requested by resolution 5/9 (11 July 2024) of United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council (HRC).

This submission comprises three sections:

- **Section I** recalls WILPF’s feminist analysis of firearms presented as instruments of patriarchy, closely linked to militarised notions of masculinity. It also examines other structural factors undermining the respect, protection and fulfilment of the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs and cultural life with regard to the civilian acquisition and use of firearms, including the firearms industry’s influence in politics and policymaking and its marketing practices which have a major impact on cultural life, including through social media, video games and film.
- **Section II** addresses issues related to the participation of civil society in policy-making and regulatory spaces relevant to firearms controls, particularly at the multilateral level and based on WILPF’s advocacy experience.
- **Section III** draws from a 2021 WILPF submission to OHCHR and recalls some examples of findings by WILPF Sections and partners on the impacts of firearms on children’s and youth’s right to participate in public and cultural life.

## **I. Underlying root causes and risk factors driving firearms-related violence on the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs**

### 1) Firearms as tools of patriarchal and militarised power: gendered impacts of firearms on the right to participate in public life and cultural life

#### **a. Men, masculinities and gun-related violence**

In their article titled ‘Autonomous Weapons and Patriarchy’,<sup>1</sup> Ray Acheson (WILPF’s Disarmament Programme Director) recalls that patriarchy is a hierarchical system of power that subordinates women and enforces rigid gender norms, oppressing anyone who deviates from these expectations, including non-binary, trans, and non-conforming individuals. Acheson highlights how militarised masculinity, rooted in dominance, violence, and dehumanisation, reinforces these patriarchal norms through socialisation, cultural institutions, and military training. **Excerpts from Acheson’s article “Autonomous weapons and patriarchy” expanding on the concept of militarised masculinities relevant to this OHCHR report are provided in Annex I.**

In its 2024 resolution on “Human rights and the civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms”<sup>2</sup>, the HRC recognised that “the ownership and use of firearms are closely linked to specific dynamics of control, power and domination and strength, which contributes to perpetuating gender-based violence, and that addressing gendered root causes of violence is essential.<sup>3</sup> The United Nations Secretary-General has highlighted that “the vast majority of weapon-related incidents are perpetrated by men, who also represent the majority of victims.”<sup>4</sup> In many

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<sup>1</sup> Ray Acheson, “Autonomous Weapons and Patriarchy” (New York: Reaching Critical Will of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, 2020), available at:

<https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Publications/aws-and-patriarchy.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> UN Human Rights Council fifty-sixth session, “Resolution on Human rights and the civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms” UN Doc A/HRC/RES/56/9 (12 July 2024).

<sup>3</sup> UN Doc A/HRC/RES/56/9, preambular paragraph 14; Patrizia Scannella, “OHCHR seeks input for report on the impact of firearms on human rights” (5 December 2024).

Available at : <https://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/news/latest-news/17289-ohchr-seeks-input-for-report-on-the-impact-of-firearms-on-human-rights>

<sup>4</sup> UN Security Council “Small arms and light weapons: Report of the Secretary-General” UN Doc S/2023/823 (1 November 2023) para. 27. Available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4026626?v=pdf#files>

countries, firearms are specifically marketed to men and boys through the use of militarised masculinities. Firearms manufacturers and military agencies also use gendered and racialised tropes to promote firearms sales along with a wider culture of militarism, war, and armed violence. Examples of this are provided in later sections of this submission.

Militarised masculinities and firearms-related violence are also a long-term public health issue—with implications for people’s ability to participate fully in cultural and political life.<sup>5</sup> A 2012 study estimated that at least two million people globally were living with non-conflict related gun injuries sustained over the course of the previous decade, in addition to which many more are affected by emotional and psychological trauma.<sup>6</sup>

An overwhelming majority of firearms-related incidents involve men as both victims and perpetrators. Unsurprisingly, given the margin by which men constitute the majority of small arms users and owners, men are far more likely than women to use firearms to injure, maim and kill others, which after all is what the instruments are designed to do. In countries with high rates of firearms violence, it is men who are the most likely to be injured or killed, often by a wide margin. Indeed, men represent 81 per cent of all victims of homicide and about 90 per cent of all perpetrators. While men are more likely to harm others with small arms, men are also much more likely to be victims of firearms-related accidents or turn firearms on themselves to commit suicide.<sup>7</sup>

Gender also plays a role in shaping the lives of survivors of armed violence and their family members. Men are for example often socialised in ways that make them less likely to seek care; often face gendered stigma associated with having become a victim; or struggle with the difficulties of achieving dominant gendered expectations placed on men—such as physical strength, being an

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the work done by the Prevention Institute to reduce gun violence: <https://www.preventioninstitute.org/focus-areas/preventing-violence-and-reducing-injury/preventing-violence-advocacy>

<sup>6</sup> Small Arms Survey “Small Arms Survey 2012: Moving Targets” (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Mireille Widmer “Surviving Armed Violence” (Policy Paper No. 2. Geneva: Geneva Declaration, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> See Madeline Drexler “Guns & Suicide - The Hidden Toll” (Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health Magazine, 2013); Maria Alejandra Otamendi “Suicidios, Femicidios-Suicidios y Armas de Fuego En Argentina. La Masculinidad Hegemónica En Debate” (Revista de Ciencias Sociales, 2020, DS-FCS 33 (46): 107–30, p. 107); Mohamed Seedat, Ashley Van Niekerk, Rachel Jewkes, Shahnaaz Suffla, and Kopano Ratele “Violence and Injuries in South Africa: Prioritising an Agenda for Prevention.” (The Lancet, 2009, 374 (9694): 1011–22)

economic provider, sexual virility or agency—due to their injuries or trauma.<sup>8</sup> In many societies, caring for the traumatised, wounded and disabled is overwhelmingly left to women, especially the unpaid work of caring within the family.<sup>9</sup> This too can limit women's ability to participate fully in cultural and political life. This concern is discussed further later in this text.

### **b. Impacts on women and girls**

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Committee has acknowledged the negative impacts of firearms on women and girls and has noted that:

“the proliferation of conventional arms, especially small arms, including diverted arms from the legal trade, can have a direct or indirect effect on women as victims of conflict-related gender-based violence, as victims of domestic violence and also as protesters or actors in resistance movements.”<sup>10</sup>

The CEDAW Committee has also stated that the accessibility and availability of firearms heighten women's risk of exposure to serious forms of gender-based violence.<sup>11</sup> Arms transfers and the prevalence of small arms are closely tied to violent expressions of masculinity and heightened militarisation in societies. These factors contribute to an increase in gender inequality and perpetuate a culture of violence, with distinct gendered consequences. Militarisation is often accompanied by a rise in violence against women and girls, driven in part by the reinforcement of dominant forms of masculinity.

WILPF sections and partners have reported on how firearms are used as a tool of intimidation and violence against women, to reaffirm patriarchal domination and authority. For instance, research carried out in 2021 with Asuda for Combating Violence against Women (hereinafter, Asuda), WILPF's partner in Iraq and Kurdistan, found that:

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<sup>8</sup> Cate Buchanan “Gun Violence, Disability and Recovery - Sydney: Surviving Gun Violence Project” (2014); Mireille Widmer, “Surviving Armed Violence” (Policy Paper No. 2. Geneva: Geneva Declaration, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> Mireille Widmer, “Surviving Armed Violence” (Policy Paper No. 2. Geneva: Geneva Declaration, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Discriminations against Women “General recommendation No.30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations” UN Doc CEDAW/C/GC/30 (18 October 2013) paragraph 32.

<sup>11</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Discriminations against Women, “General recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19” UN Doc CEDAW/C/GC/35 (14 July 2017) paragraph 42.

“The available data on reported violence also shows a direct link between the prevalence of armed violence and high crime rates in Iraq, the proliferation of firearms in the country, and violence against women, with firearms figuring prominently in cases of domestic violence and the number of cases involving firearms increasing.”<sup>12</sup>

The researchers also found that:

“(...) firearms are often used as a means of intimidation or as weapons for perpetrating physical assault, contributing to the underreporting of the widespread use of firearms in cases of violence. Thus, Asuda and the researchers of this report acknowledge that there are many more cases of violence occurring in Iraq and KRI than have been represented in this document.”<sup>13</sup>

They recommended, among other things, to

“Create space for women’s rights NGOs to play a greater role in educating the public on the use of firearms in domestic violence, and to develop or build upon programs or initiatives that enable women experiencing violence to safely seek support and report violence without fear of consequence or retribution.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> ASUDA and WILPF, “The correlation between the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Iraq and rates of violence against women: Presenting effective recommendations to advocates and policymakers” (February 2021) page 22, available at: [https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Smalls\\_arms\\_and\\_violence\\_against\\_women\\_Iraq\\_Web.pdf](https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Smalls_arms_and_violence_against_women_Iraq_Web.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> ASUDA and WILPF, “The correlation between the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Iraq and rates of violence against women: Presenting effective recommendations to advocates and policymakers”, (February 2021) page 22, available at: [https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Smalls\\_arms\\_and\\_violence\\_against\\_women\\_Iraq\\_Web.pdf](https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Smalls_arms_and_violence_against_women_Iraq_Web.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> ASUDA and WILPF, “The correlation between the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Iraq and rates of violence against women: Presenting effective recommendations to advocates and policymakers”, (February 2021) page 22, available at: [https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Smalls\\_arms\\_and\\_violence\\_against\\_women\\_Iraq\\_Web.pdf](https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Smalls_arms_and_violence_against_women_Iraq_Web.pdf)

Research conducted in 2020 by WILPF's Syrian partner organisation, Dawlaty, also found that:

“Regarding access to justice, many women agreed during the consultation sessions that criminals who perpetrated crimes of sexual violence escaped punishment and accountability because they were “the ruling regime” and power lay in their hands, and because arms proliferation granted them a form of impunity. The young men believe that if they have weapons, they have impunity and power; that by having firearms they have authority,” said a participant in a consultation session in Gaziantep.”<sup>15</sup>

According to the Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), approximately 4.5 million women have been threatened with a firearm by an intimate partner in the United States. YWCA notes the connection with mass shootings: “shooters killed intimate partners or other family members in at least 54 percent of mass shootings,”<sup>16</sup> adding that women make up 50 per cent of the victims in such shootings—often women being targeted due to the correlation between intimate partner violence and mass shootings.

The 2023 UN Secretary General's report on sexual violence in conflict found that:

“In 2023, weapon bearers perpetrated sexual violence crimes, as reported in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, South Sudan and the Sudan, demonstrating that the illicit proliferation and widespread availability of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition directly facilitated incidents of sexual violence (see S/2023/823). By fuelling armed conflict, weapons proliferation contributed to the creation of an environment conducive to the perpetration of sexual violence with impunity. According to United Nations research, where data are available, approximately 70 to 90 per cent of incidents of conflict-related sexual violence involve small arms and light weapons. Moreover, sexual violence played a significant role in the political economy of war, with trafficking for the purposes of

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<sup>15</sup> WILPF and Dawlaty, “Sexual Violence by Force of Arms Against Women in Syria: A Tool of Political Repression, Social Dismantling, and Impoverishment of Women and Communities” (20 October 2020) available at: [https://www.wilpf.org/advocacy\\_documents/policy-brief-sexual-violence-by-force-of-arms-against-women-in-syria-a-tool-of-political-repression-social-dismantling-and-impoverishment-of-women-and-communities/](https://www.wilpf.org/advocacy_documents/policy-brief-sexual-violence-by-force-of-arms-against-women-in-syria-a-tool-of-political-repression-social-dismantling-and-impoverishment-of-women-and-communities/)

<sup>16</sup> Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), “Preventing Gun Violence” (YWCA website, accessed 15 January 2025). Available at: <https://www.ywca.org/advocacy/advocacy-agenda/preventing-gun-violence#:~:text=The%20connections%20between%20domestic%20violence,54%20percent%20of%20mass%20shootings.>

sexual exploitation and increasingly, kidnapping, with the threat and use of sexual violence to extort higher ransom, enabling armed groups to generate revenue.”<sup>17</sup>

Firearms are not only used to facilitate sexual and gender-based violence but also hinder women’s engagement in public and political life. Within a context of structural discrimination and inequality, arms increase a climate of fear due to increased risks of sexual and gender-based violence. This climate prevents women from exercising their right to participate in public affairs such as conflict resolution processes, electoral participation, and public demonstrations. The widespread availability of arms undermines women’s equality, reducing their bargaining power within households, limiting their mobility, and restricting access to essential resources, business opportunities, and employment.

Moreover, widespread possession and use of arms tend to prevent women from fully participating in public and political life, because, for instance, women and girls may face “secondary victimisation”, predominantly in their role as caregivers to firearms-related violence survivors who are seriously injured and may as a result have disabilities, which in turn limits their opportunities to access public and political life.

### **c. Impacts on LGBTQ+ people**

Firearms seem to be a leading instrument of violence against LGBTQ+ people, including in homicides. A case in point is the United States. Statistics are difficult to measure because crime and firearms-related violence statistics “typically do not measure victims’ or perpetrators’ sexual orientations, gender identities, or gender expressions,”<sup>18</sup> notes a report from the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). However, the National Coalition of Anti-Violence tracked that firearms were used in about 60 per cent of bias-motivated homicides of LGBTQ+ people in the United States, and that firearms are also frequently used to intimidate and threaten LGBTQ+ people.

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<sup>17</sup> UN Secretary General, “Conflict-related sexual violence - Report of the United Nations Secretary General” UN Doc S/2024/292 (April 2024). Available at: <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/SG-2023-annual-reportsmallFINAL.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> Adam P. Romero, Ari M. Shaw and Kerith J. Conron “Gun Violence Against Sexual and Gender Minorities in the United States: A review of research findings and need” (UCLA, April 2019) page 5. Available at: <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/gun-violence-sgm-us/>

Transgender women of colour face an extraordinarily high risk of firearms-related violence: “transgender women are four times more likely to experience firearms-related violence than cisgender women, and nearly 85 percent of transgender victims are women of color.”<sup>19</sup>

This is not a uniquely US phenomenon; LGBTQ+ people—and those perceived to be transgressing gender norms—are subject to firearms-related violence around the world. This can include during armed conflict, when LGBTQ+ people, “who are often among the least protected of all groups, face additional perils created by the chaotic environment and breakdown of law and order.”<sup>20</sup> In Iraq, for example, Daesh shot women who violated social norms for “being lesbians” and killed men and boys “whom it deems to have transgressed gender norms by failing to adhere to its strict dress and appearance code, often alleging that they are homosexual or insufficiently masculine.”<sup>21</sup> In Colombia, Peru, and throughout Central America, LGBTQ+ people have been killed by armed groups and state forces during armed conflict. “Violence against the LGBTQ+ community was not invented” during conflict, says Marcela Sánchez, director of Bogotá-based Colombia Diversa. “But we’ve found that this violence increases in conflict zones.”<sup>22</sup>

“Weapons are consistently used as a symbol of power, authority, and their persistent availability contributes to escalating conflicts,”—writes DRC activist Annie Matundu-Mbambi—<sup>23</sup>, adding that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons “jeopardises women’s ability to participate in

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<sup>19</sup> Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), “Preventing Gun Violence” (YWCA website, accessed 15 January 2025) Available at: <https://www.ywca.org/advocacy/advocacy-agenda/preventing-gun-violence#:~:text=The%20connections%20between%20domestic%20violence,54%20percent%20of%20mass%20shootings.>

<sup>20</sup> A. Margalit “Still a blind spot: The protection of LGBT persons during armed conflict and other situations of violence” (International Review of the Red Cross, 2018), 237-265).

<sup>21</sup> The Human Rights and Gender Justice, Clinic of the City University of New York School of Law, MADRE, The Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq “Communication to the ICC Prosecutor Pursuant to Article 15 of the Rome Statute Requesting a Preliminary Examination into the Situation of: Gender-Based Persecution and Torture as Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Committed by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Iraq” (8 November 2017). Available at:

<https://peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/CUNY%20MADRE%20OWFI%20Article%2015%20Communication%20Submission%20Gender%20Crimes%20in%20Iraq%20PDF.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> Simon West, “Colombia’s LGBTQ Community: Victims of armed conflict” (NBC News, 7 September 2016). Available at: <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/colombia-s-lgbt-population-victims-armed-conflict-n643861>

<sup>23</sup> A. Matundu-Mbambi, “The link between the proliferation of SALW and gender-based violence” WILPF DRC, (August 2019) page 1. Available at: <http://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Publications/drc-english.pdf>.

conflict resolution, elections, governance and post-conflict reconstruction processes.”<sup>24</sup> Similarly, as other firearms-related violence researchers argue, when it comes to gender-based violence against LGBTQ+ people, “mass shootings and hate crimes targeting LGBT people are especially potent forms of violence. They terrorize not only those immediately and physically impacted, but the entire community.”<sup>25</sup>

## 2) The gun industry’s impacts on the right to take part in public and cultural life

### c. The gun industry’s lobbying in politics

The gun industry’s lobbying in the political sphere — such as opposing legislation on civilian firearms acquisition and use and generally resisting accountability for the harm caused by those involved in the production and sales of firearms— hampers the exercise of the right to take part in public and political life. A 2023 WILPF submission to OHCHR<sup>26</sup> highlighted harmful lobbying tactics, including efforts by US firearm companies, to undermine legislation aiming at restricting access to firearms by perpetrators of domestic violence. “<sup>26</sup>

The influence of the firearm industry, including via funding of political campaigns and other forms of pressure over politicians, is well-documented in the US and elsewhere, including in Brazil, Canada and South Africa, and remains a structural barrier to adequate regulation and accountability of the sector.<sup>27</sup> This in turn undermines the effective exercise of individuals’ right to take part in public life in the US and elsewhere. US investigative media ProPublica has recently unveiled a multidecade secret program by the US firearm lobby aimed at persuading firearms

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<sup>24</sup> A. Matundu-Mbambi, “The link between the proliferation of SALW and gender-based violence” WILPF DRC, (August 2019) page 1. Available at: <http://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Publications/drc-english.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> Adam P. Romero, Ari M. Shaw and Kerith J. Conron, “Gun Violence Against Sexual and Gender Minorities in the United States: A review of research findings and need” (UCLA, April 2019) page 4. Available at: <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/gun-violence-sgm-us/>

<sup>26</sup> WILPF, “Submission to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for the 2023 report on the negative human rights impact of the civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms, pursuant to HRC resolution 50/12” (8 February 2023). Available at: [https://www.wilpf.org/advocacy\\_documents/submission-to-ohchr-on-the-negative-impacts-of-firearms-and-the-role-of-the-business-sector/](https://www.wilpf.org/advocacy_documents/submission-to-ohchr-on-the-negative-impacts-of-firearms-and-the-role-of-the-business-sector/)

<sup>27</sup> Amanda Erickson, “How the NRA has shaped the world’s gun laws” (Washington Post, 14 March 2018).

owners to vote for the firearms industry's preferred political candidates.<sup>28</sup> According to this investigation,

“At least 10 gun industry businesses, including Glock, Smith & Wesson, Remington, Marlin and Mossberg, handed over names, addresses and other private data to the gun industry’s chief lobbying group, the National Shooting Sports Foundation. The NSSF then entered the gun owners’ details into what would become a massive database.”<sup>29</sup>

“Confidential information from gun customers was central to what NSSF called its voter education program. The initiative involved sending letters, postcards and later emails to persuade people to vote for the firearms industry’s preferred political candidates. Because privacy laws shield the names of firearm purchasers from public view, the data NSSF obtained gave it a unique ability to identify and contact large numbers of gun owners or shooting sports enthusiasts. It also allowed the NSSF to figure out whether a gun buyer was a registered voter. Those who weren’t would be encouraged to register and cast their ballots for industry-supported politicians.”<sup>30</sup>

“From 2000 to 2016, the organization poured more than \$20 million into its voter education campaign, which was initially called Vote Your Sport and today is known as GunVote. The NSSF trumpeted the success of its electioneering in reports, claiming credit for putting both George W. Bush and Donald J. Trump in the White House and firearm-friendly lawmakers in the U.S. House and Senate.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Corey G. Johnson, “Without knowledge or consent” (ProPublica, 24 October 2024). Available at: <https://www.propublica.org/article/gunmakers-owners-sensitive-personal-information-glock-remington-nssf>; Truthout, “Inside the Multi-Decade Effort to Mobilize Gun Owners as a Political Force” (24 October 2024). Available at: <https://truthout.org/articles/inside-the-multi-decade-effort-to-mobilize-gun-owners-as-a-political-force/>

<sup>29</sup> Corey G. Johnson, “Without knowledge or consent” (ProPublica, 24 October 2024). Available at: <https://www.propublica.org/article/gunmakers-owners-sensitive-personal-information-glock-remington-nssf>

<sup>30</sup> Corey G. Johnson, “Without knowledge or consent” (ProPublica, 24 October 2024). Available at: <https://www.propublica.org/article/gunmakers-owners-sensitive-personal-information-glock-remington-nssf>

<sup>31</sup> Corey G. Johnson, “Without knowledge or consent” (ProPublica, 24 October 2024). Available at: <https://www.propublica.org/article/gunmakers-owners-sensitive-personal-information-glock-remington-nssf>

In addition to being unfair and deceptive business behaviour, these business practices also violate individuals' rights to privacy and to take part in public affairs and present serious threats to the democratic functioning of the electoral system. Indeed, according to the Human Rights Committee's General Comment no. 25 on the right to participate in public affairs:

“Persons entitled to vote must be free to vote for any candidate for election and for or against any proposal submitted to referendum or plebiscite, and free to support or to oppose government, without undue influence or coercion of any kind which may distort or inhibit the free expression of the elector's will. Voters should be able to form opinions independently, free of violence or threat of violence, compulsion, inducement or manipulative interference of any kind. Reasonable limitations on campaign expenditure may be justified where this is necessary to ensure that the free choice of voters is not undermined or the democratic process distorted by the disproportionate expenditure on behalf of any candidate or party.”<sup>32</sup>

In addition, the OHCHR's guidelines on the right to take part in public affairs state that:

“23. States should promote the principles of openness and transparency in all aspects of decision-making processes, and of accountability of public authorities for the implementation of the right to participate in public affairs.

(b) States should create effective mechanisms to ensure the accountability of non-State actors, including business enterprises, involved in the development and implementation of public policy and other public decisions.”<sup>33</sup>

Finally, as part of its responsibilities to respect human rights under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the firearms industry must also “strive for coherence between their

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<sup>32</sup> Human Rights Committee “General Comment No. 25: The right to participate in public affairs, voting rights and the right of equal access to public service (Art. 25)” Un Doc CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.7 (12 August 1996) paragraph 19.

<sup>33</sup> OHCHR “Guidelines for States on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs” (20 July 2018), paragraph 23 b). Available at:

[https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/PublicAffairs/GuidelinesRightParticipatePublicAffairs\\_web.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/PublicAffairs/GuidelinesRightParticipatePublicAffairs_web.pdf)

responsibility to respect human rights and policies and procedures that govern their wider business activities and relationships".<sup>34</sup> This also applies to their lobbying activities.

#### **d. The gun lobby's impact on political violence and extremism**

The US gun lobby has contributed to the growth of extremist groups in the US and beyond—with dire implications for full and equal access to participation in political and culture life. The US organisation Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund (Everytown) explains:

“For decades, the gun lobby has sought to leverage the extreme right’s fixation on guns and gun rights to its own ends. It has deployed an unrelenting ‘Us vs. Them’ narrative, telling its members that they are under constant threat from dangers ranging from roving bands of criminals to would-be authoritarians on the political left, a stance that echoes the worldview of the extreme right. In this dystopian portrait, widespread violence and illiberal forces have successfully taken control in the rest of the world, and the only thing stopping them from coming to the US are Americans’ guns.”<sup>35</sup>

Looking at the connection with the US Constitution’s Second Amendment,<sup>36</sup> the organisation Brady usefully describes this phenomenon as ‘Second Amendment extremism’, which they describe as the “insurrectionist construction of the Second Amendment, which holds that the right to keep and bear arms necessarily includes the right to take up arms against the government”<sup>37</sup>. According to Brady, ‘Second Amendment extremism’ also holds that the right to bear arms is the most important of all rights in the US and that without it, the government would trample on the right to free speech, freedom of religion and other longstanding rights. Brady connects the dots between the gun lobby, Second Amendment extremism and far-right political violence in the US. “This extremist idea —

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<sup>34</sup> OHCHR “Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations ‘Protect, Respect and Remedy’ Framework” Un Doc HR/PUB/11/04 (2011), page 17. Available at:

[https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinesshr\\_en.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinesshr_en.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> Everytown “Armed and Dangerous: How the Gun Lobby Enriches Guns as Tools of Extreme Right” (30 September 2020). Available at: <https://everytownresearch.org/report/extreme-right/>

<sup>36</sup> The Second Amendment to the US Constitution was ratified in 1795 and states that “A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” The gun industry invokes this amendment to argue that all US citizens have the inalienable right to own guns.

<sup>37</sup> Horwitz, J. & Anderson, C. “Guns, democracy, and the insurrectionist idea” (University of Michigan Press Ann Arbor 2009)– in Brady “Origin of an Insurrection: How Second Amendment Extremisms led to January 6” page 4. Available at: <https://www.bradyunited.org/resources/research/origin-of-an-insurrection>.

that citizens may rightfully wield force against perceived tyranny — is exactly what drove many would-be insurrectionists to the Capitol on January 6 [2021].”<sup>38</sup>

An amicus brief filed by the Human Rights Clinic at the University of Texas School of Law in relation to the advisory opinion by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights requested by Mexico<sup>39</sup> provides a number of examples of how the gun industry markets its products to extremist groups who routinely use their firearms to diminish citizens’ ability to access their right to political and cultural activities:

“Spike’s Tactical produced an ad in 2018 - notably before the social upheaval of 2020 - that featured the tagline ‘Not Today Antifa’ while depicting a group of men holding AR-15s engaging in a confrontation with another group of men sporting balaclavas, intended to be understood as anti-fascist groups. When Kyle Rittenhouse killed two men and injured a third participating in a Black Lives Matter protest in Kenosha, Wisconsin in 2020 he was hailed as a manly hero by the gun industry. A major retailer, Big Daddy Unlimited, posted a graphic of Rittenhouse to social media with the words, “be a man among men.”<sup>40</sup>

The Giffords Law Center in the US reviewed more than 150 federal indictments for individuals charged with threatening federal elected officials.<sup>41</sup> It found that more often than not, firearms are invoked or used in the most serious threats of political violence. Alarmingly, female lawmakers and lawmakers of colour were disproportionately represented among threatened individuals, and a majority of threats against people in these groups involved firearms.

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<sup>38</sup> Brady “Origin of an Insurrection: How Second Amendment Extremisms led to January 6” page 5. Available at: <https://www.bradyunited.org/resources/research/origin-of-an-insurrection>.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, “Inter-American Court of Human Rights: México requested an Advisory Opinion on the international responsibility of firearms manufacturers” (23 March 2023). Available at: <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/inter-american-court-of-human-rights-mexico-requested-an-advisory-opinion-on-the-international-responsibility-of-firearms-manufacturers/>.

<sup>40</sup> Human Rights Clinic “Inter-American Court of Human Rights - Amicus Curiae - Mexico’s request for an advisory opinion regard the activities of private companies engaged in the firearm s industry and their effects in human rights” (University of Texas School of Law) page 26. Available at: [https://www.corteidh.or.cr/sitios/observaciones/OC-30/26\\_unitexas.pdf](https://www.corteidh.or.cr/sitios/observaciones/OC-30/26_unitexas.pdf). See also: Ryan Busse “The Gun Industry Created a New Consumer. Now It’s Killing Us.” (25 July 2022). Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/07/firearms-industry-marketing-mass-shooter/670621/>

<sup>41</sup> Giffords, “Guns & Democracy” (accessed on 15 January 2025). Available at: <https://giffords.org/issues/guns-democracy/>

Emphasising that the rise of armed extremism and the use of guns by extremists “poses a significant threat to American democracy”, the Giffords Law Center offers the following examples, three amongst many:

1. In October 2020, members of the Boogaloo Bois, a far-right extremist group that advocates for a second American Civil War and is known for its anti-government and pro-gun stance, were charged with attempting to incite violence during Black Lives Matter protests in Las Vegas.<sup>42</sup>
2. In October 2022, armed vigilantes in Maricopa County, Arizona, patrolled ballot drop boxes, further intimidating voters by taking photos and videos.<sup>43</sup>
3. Across the country, armed extremists have increasingly targeted drag events and LGBTQ+ gatherings.<sup>44</sup>

For further information on the linkages between ‘Second Amendment extremism’ in the US, misogyny, violence against LGBTIQ+ and racialised individuals, **please see excerpts from Ray Acheson’s article “Gun Violence and the Marketing of Militarism provided in Annex II.**<sup>45</sup>

The Giffords Law Center argues:

“Greater numbers of guns in public, more gun violence, and growing extremism threaten participation in all facets of our democratic process: at legislative hearings, school board meetings, demonstrations, rallies, the voting booth, and in vote tabulation centers.”<sup>46</sup>

Researchers in Mexico have shown that when criminal violence increases, citizens abandon public channels of participation and take refuge in their private spheres, and that the level of electoral

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<sup>42</sup> See Lois Beckett, “Boogaloo Boi” charged in fire of Minneapolis police precinct during George Floyd protest” (The Guardian, 23 October 2020). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/23/texas-boogaloo-boi-minneapolis-police-building-george-floyd>.

<sup>43</sup> See Jacob Knutson “Election officials: Armed ‘vigilantes’ near ballot drop box in Arizona” (Axios, 23 October 2022). Available at: <https://wwwaxios.com/2022/10/23/mesa-arizona-armed-vigilantes-ballot-drop-box>

<sup>44</sup> See GLAAD, “Updated report: Drag Events faced more than 160 protests and significant threats since early 2022”. Available at: <https://glaad.org/anti-drag-report/>.

<sup>45</sup> Ray Acheson, “Gun Violence and the Marketing of Militarism” (Counter Punch. 18 July 2024). Available at: <<https://www.counterpunch.org/2024/07/28/gun-violence-and-the-marketing-of-militarism/>>.

<sup>46</sup> Giffords, “Guns & Democracy” (accessed on 15 January 2025). Available at: <https://giffords.org/issues/guns-democracy/>

turnout is lower in the most violent regions of the country. There, survey data confirm that citizens exposed to high levels of criminal violence are less likely to vote.<sup>47</sup>

Research confirms that elsewhere across Latin America, one of the central challenges to democracy is gun violence. Arjona and de la Calle write:

“Guerrillas and paramilitaries in Colombia, transnational drug traffickers in Mexico and Central America, as well as smaller armed groups in places like Jamaica and Brazil have victimized hundreds of thousands of rural and urban citizens. Many democracies in the region have had to deal with a real threat to public order and had to address the multiple legacies of large-scale victimization.”<sup>48</sup>

They argue that this has very detrimental effects on citizen participation in public life:

“As long as organized groups cannot safely participate in politics, representation is in jeopardy. Likewise, different agents of the state, especially its security apparatus, often rely on illicit means to address problems of public order. Together, these different forms of victimization hinder citizens' trust on the state and the law.”<sup>49</sup>

Firearms are also used as a tool to facilitate violence against social leaders in Colombia. According to *Programa Somos Defensores*, in 2023 out of the 168 murders of human rights defenders recorded in Colombia, 125 were committed with firearms.<sup>50</sup> Social, Indigenous and ethnic leaders are disproportionately impacted by these killings. According to the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) ethnic communities are among the most vulnerable targets, with Afro-Colombians, Indigenous rights activists and rural farmers being among the highest numbers of

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<sup>47</sup> Trelles, Alejandro, and Miguel Carreras, “Bullets and Votes: Violence and Electoral Participation in Mexico” (Journal of Politics in Latin America, 2012).

<sup>48</sup> Ana Arjona, Luis De La Calle, “Conflict, violence and democracy in Latin America” (Política y gobierno, June 2016). Available at: <[http://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S1665-20372016000100005&lng=es&nrm=iso](http://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1665-20372016000100005&lng=es&nrm=iso)>.

<sup>49</sup> Ana Arjona, Luis De La Calle, “Conflict, violence and democracy in Latin America” (Política y gobierno, June 2016). Available at: <[http://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S1665-20372016000100005&lng=es&nrm=iso](http://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1665-20372016000100005&lng=es&nrm=iso)>.

<sup>50</sup> Programa Somos Defensores, “Punto Suspensivos: Informe Anual 2023” (16 May 2024) page 109. Available at: <https://somosdefensores.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/informe-PUNTOS-SUSPENSIVOS-espanol.pdf>

victims.<sup>51</sup> As highlighted by WILPF Colombia in 2019, “This is a clear violation of their civil and political rights since social leaders cannot fully carry out their work and live in constant fear. Many of those killed had received previous threats [...] These killings not only constitute a limitation for these communities to raise their voice and advance their proposals with the national government, but represents an obstacle for a sustainable, lasting peace in Colombia.”<sup>52</sup>

The findings from the Americas are borne out in other countries and regions as well. In a 2006 study on the causes and consequences of electoral violence in conflict affected societies, with Sri Lanka as a case study, Kristine Höglund identifies guns identified as a key factor of electoral violence:

“From the perspective of democratic politics, violence and insecurity may affect the election results or the outcome of elections in various ways. Threats and intimidation may be used to interfere with the registration of voters. Voter turnout may be influenced if large sections of the population refrain from casting their votes due to fear of violence. Assaults, threats, and political assassinations during the election campaign may force political contenders to leave the electoral process or prevent elections from taking place. From a conflict management perspective, violence may have a negative impact by polarizing the electorate along conflict lines and in extreme cases led to new outbursts of violence. Hardliners or extremists may come to power because of violence in connection with elections. In situations of insecurity, appeals for law and order are often a more tempting alternative than calls for reconciliation.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Gimena, Sánchez-Garzoli, “At Least 13 Human Rights, Social Leaders Killed in Colombia So Far in 2019” (7 February 2019). Available at: <https://www.wola.org/2019/02/human-rights-social-leaders-killed-colombia-january-2019/>. See also: Human Rights Watch ‘Left Undefended Killings of Rights Defenders in Colombia’s Remote Communities’ (10 February 2021). Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/02/10/left-undefended/killings-rights-defenders-colombias-remote-communities>.

<sup>52</sup> WILPF Colombia (LIMPAL) “Submission from the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, national section of Colombia, to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms on civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights” (19 February 2019) page 3.

<sup>53</sup> Kristine Höglund “Elections in War-Ravaged Societies: The Case of Sri Lanka”, in Power Sharing and Democratic Governance in Divided Societies. Oslo: Peace Research Center Oslo. (2006) ; See also UNDP “Elections and Conflict Prevention Guide” (24 July 2017) page 5. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/publications/elections-and-conflict-prevention-guide>.

## e. Militainment and social media influencers promoting guns (“gunfluencers”)

In an article on “Gun Violence and the Marketing of Militarism,”<sup>54</sup> Ray Acheson notes that:

“Without exception, gunfluencers operating in many different countries market a particular form of masculinity along with the guns. So do the films, television programs, and video games that relate to war or involve armed violence. This is a kind of masculinity that celebrates heteronormativity, independence, aggression, and suppression of emotions. In each country represented at the meeting on militainment, the construction of a militarized and violent notion of “manhood” was central to gun-related advertisements. Whether guns are being marketed to white men in the United States, appealing to their perceived political and social disenfranchisement; or to young women in Brazil, suggesting that they will be sexy and empowered or safe and secure if they know how to use a gun, gendered tropes are at the heart of the militainment industry’s advertising.”

Acheson also indicates that:

“Simultaneously, these same companies use gunfluencers to build up a victim narrative of white heteronormative men that puts racial diversity and feminism in the crosshairs. The victim narrative constructed by and within the so-called manosphere—social media platforms and other online forums dominated by white men that promote misogyny and “men’s rights”—blame feminists and people of colour for the problems these men feel they are facing in a “new world order” in which their dominance is no longer taken as inherent or acceptable.”

“ “After centuries of domination,” notes activist and writer Joshua P. Hill, “some men are liable to take women demanding equal footing as oppression, or to deliberately mistake it for that as an excuse to build power using grievance politics.” In many cases, this is leading men to violence. Believing that the system is rigged against them and seeking comradery

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<sup>54</sup> Ray Acheson, “Gun violence and the marketing of militarism” (Counterpunch, 28 July 2024). Available at: <https://www.counterpunch.org/2024/07/28/gun-violence-and-the-marketing-of-militarism/>.

from others experiencing this same perceived loss of status, discussions about guns and militarism is common in the manosphere.”

Research has also shown how these misogynist attitudes are being expressed in web forums where 3D-printed firearm prototypes are discussed and shared. It is important for policy makers to take into account the existence of these online movements and to better understand the crossovers between 3D-printed guns and extremists advocating for gender-based violence.<sup>55</sup>

**f. Regulating gun industry marketing to limit civilian acquisition and its attendant negative impact on the right to participation in political and cultural life**

To understand the pervasive normalisation and romanticisation of guns and violence and thus, to limit their inevitable negative impact on civilian life, including the right to participate in cultural and political life, it is necessary to focus on the marketing strategies used by the gun industry, including especially those that exploit and mobilise ideas about manhood.

WILPF’s research highlights the need to regulate more tightly four overlapping gun marketing mechanisms:

1. Gender exploitative gun advertising that positions guns and arms as a way to perform manhood.
2. Product placement of guns in film, television and video games.
3. Online technology platforms which facilitate transnational marketing of weapons and host polarising gun forums and dangerous online gun tutorials.
4. The gun lobby and the politics of fear, the intertwined world of gun manufacturers, the gun lobby and anti-democratic forces who use fear to sell weapons and mobilise their membership to restrict gun control regulations across the world.

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<sup>55</sup> Basra, Rajan, “Understanding the 3D-printed Guns Movement: A Surprising Mix of Identities and the Risk of Gender-based Violence” (Small Arms Survey, 26 November 2024). Available at: <https://smallarmssurvey.medium.com/understanding-the-3d-printed-guns-movement-misogyny-and-a-surprising-mix-of-ideologies-and-7697d76a7bdf>. Rajan Basra, “Behind the Mask: Uncovering the Extremist Messages of a 3D-Printed Gun Designer” (ICSR King’s College, 2023). Available at: <https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/ICSR-Report-Behind-the-Mask-Uncovering-the-Extremist-Messages-of-a-3D%20Printed-Gun-Designer.pdf>.

In a 2022 report, the US Congressional Committee on Oversight and Reform noted that gun “companies used disturbing sales tactics including marketing deadly weapons as a way for young men to prove their manliness,”<sup>56</sup> and reported that “Materials obtained by the Committee show how sellers tout assault rifles military pedigree, make covert references to violent white supremacists (...), and prey on young men's insecurities by claiming their weapons will put them at the top of the testosterone food chain.”<sup>57</sup>

Other research shows that sometimes gun marketers also market guns to far-right extremist groups in ways that are quite overt. For instance, it has been reported that Palmetto State Armory has used their advertisements to appeal to the group ‘the Boogaloo Bois’, a group that has been identified by the US Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) as a far-right domestic terrorist threat, and like other ideologically similar groups such as the Oath Keepers and the Three Percenters, often openly brandishes firearms to intimidate citizen participation in political protests.<sup>58</sup>

Brady has described the marketing practices of gun manufacturer Smith & Wesson as trying to “market the gun as a totem—a substitute for masculinity to teenagers.”<sup>59</sup> This aligns with research showing that investments in stereotypical masculine ideals,” are linked to support for the idea of gun ownership as protective.”<sup>60</sup>

Video games are enormously influential. It has been reported that the global video games industry has 3.09 billion users with revenue of about USD 196 billion in 2023, more than the combined

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<sup>56</sup> US Congressional Committee on Oversight and Reform on The Committee's into Gun Industry Practices and Profits, (27 July 2022) page 1. Available at: <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/GO/GO00/20220727/115024/HHRG-117-GO00-20220727-SD005.pdf>.

<sup>57</sup> US Congressional Committee on Oversight and Reform on The Committee's into Gun Industry Practices and Profits, (27 July 2022) page 2. Available at: <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/GO/GO00/20220727/115024/HHRG-117-GO00-20220727-SD005.pdf>.

<sup>58</sup> Human Rights Clinic, “Inter-American Court of Human Rights - Amicus Curiae - Mexico's request for an advisory opinion regard the activities of private companies engaged in the firearm s industry and their effects in human rights” (University of Texas School of Law) page 26. Available at: [https://www.corteidh.or.cr/sitios/observaciones/OC-30/26\\_unitexas.pdf](https://www.corteidh.or.cr/sitios/observaciones/OC-30/26_unitexas.pdf). See also: Ryan Busse “The Gun Industry Created a New Consumer. Now It's Killing Us.” (25 July 2022). Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/07/firearms-industry-marketing-mass-shooter/670621/>

<sup>59</sup> Jon Skolnik, “Gun Manufactures Quietly Target Young Boys Using Social Media Companies like Smith & Wesson have “influencers” and “sponsored shooters” to connect with younger audiences” (truthout, 18 September 2021). Available at: <https://truthout.org/articles/gun-manufactures-quietly-target-young-boys-using-social-media/>.

<sup>60</sup> See Warner, Tara D et al. “To Provide or Protect? Masculinity, Economic Precarity, and Protective Gun Ownership in the United States.” (2022)

revenue from streaming and box-office sales.<sup>61</sup> A recent study by the Geena Davis Institute on representations of men and masculinities in video games finds that “almost half of male video game characters (48.9 per cent) carry a gun during gameplay. One-in-three (33.3 per cent) male video game characters were shown killing one or more humans, and one-in-eight (12.5 per cent) male video game characters were shown killing more than ten.”<sup>62</sup> The insidious role video games play in grooming young people to valorise weapons and normalise violence is the focus of a recent lawsuit brought by parents of the children killed in the school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, against Daniel Defense, a gun company, Call of Duty, its publisher Activision, and Instagram.<sup>63</sup>

Similarly, the gun industry invests significant resources in product placement in movies and television shows. The net effect of this is that gun violence in movies and television has increased dramatically over time, especially in movies accessible to teens. A 2017 study of gun violence in top-selling movies found that acts of gun violence in movies authorised for children over 13 years of age nearly tripled between 1985 and 2015, whereas the rate has doubled in prime-time TV dramas between 2000 and 2018.<sup>64</sup>

The gun industry does not restrict its advertising to magazines, films and video games. The internet has a far larger reach, and the gun industry capitalises on it. Top manufacturers of US firearms received 98 million views on YouTube and Twitter channels alone. On Instagram, gun manufacturers have tens of millions of followers amongst them. Glock has 2.1 million, Sig Sauer 1.6 million, Smith and Wesson 1.1 million.<sup>65</sup> Their numbers pale in comparison, though, to GunTubers, or “gunfluencers”. According to a 2020 analysis, total post views by the leading

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<sup>61</sup> Consultancy.com, “Global video game industry on a healthy growth trajectory to \$250 billion” (4 September 2024). Available at:

<https://www.consultancy-me.com/news/9177/global-video-game-industry-on-a-healthy-growth-trajectory>

<sup>62</sup> Geena Davis Institute, “The Double-Edged Sword of Online Gaming An Analysis of Masculinity in Video Games and the Gaming Community” (2021) page 20. Available at: <https://geenadavisinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/gaming-study-2021-7.pdf>.

<sup>63</sup> See Brandon Drenon, “Uvalde families sue Meta, video game creator and gunmaker”, (BBC, 25 May 2024). Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c8449dxw23do>.

<sup>64</sup> Daniel Romer, Patrick E. Jamieson, Kathleen Hall Jamieson, “The Continuing Rise of Gun Violence in PG-13 Movies, 1985 to 2015” (Pediatrics, February 2017); See also Bushman, Brad J., Patrick E. Jamieson, Ilana Weitz, and Daniel Romer. “Gun Violence Trends in Movies.” *Pediatrics* 132, no. 6 (December 1, 2013): 1014–18.

<sup>65</sup> Dean Peacock “WILPF-GENSAC desk review on militarainment, militarization, gender stereotyping and the marketing of militarized masculinities” (26 September 2023).

guntubers runs into the billions.<sup>66</sup> Many are sponsored by the National Rifle Association. Most are men. Almost all link gun ownership with stereotypical ideas of manhood.

Furthermore, social media companies provide platforms for self-produced and uploaded content that often circumvents advertising regulations, romanticises weapons, offers graphic instructions on how to use them or alter them for greater impact, and creates online gun forums in the ‘mansphere’ in which misogyny and racism are common and in which violent extremist groups propagate their ideologies, celebrate their martyrs and actively recruit.

This glut of multi-channel gun marketing has predictable, differentiated and disastrous gendered consequences for men, women, and people of all genders and ages—in other words, for all of us. The all-too-common net effect in far too many places is to limit people’s movement and their ability to participate fully in public and cultural life.

## **II. Civil society and the right to take part in public and political life relevant to the regulation and controls of civilian acquisition and use of firearms**

### **1) The importance of civil society space in firearms regulation and controls**

According to the Human Rights Committee’s General Comment 25 on the right to participate in public affairs,

“Citizens also take part in the conduct of public affairs by exerting influence through public debate and dialogue with their representatives or through their capacity to organize themselves. This participation is supported by ensuring freedom of expression, assembly and association.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> See Jordan L, Kalin J, Dabrowski C “Characteristics of Gun Advertisements on Social Media: Systematic Search and Content Analysis of Twitter and YouTube Posts” (J Med Internet Res 2020). See also: YouTube gun channel ranking <https://www.fieldspartschannel.tv/guns-yt/>.

<sup>67</sup> Human Rights Committee “General Comment No. 25: The right to participate in public affairs, voting rights and the right of equal access to public service (Art. 25)” UN Doc CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.7 (12 Juillet 1996). paragraph 8.

Individuals — including through their participation in civil society, the media, academia, political opposition, trade unions, NGOs, — and their elected officials should have the ability to effectively monitor governmental decision-making in the realm of firearms regulation. Parliaments and governments should provide access to information about policies, decisions, plans, laws, budgets, practices and consultation processes to enable meaningful public participation in the regulation of the civilian acquisition and use of firearms nationally, in decisions regarding the transfer of firearms to third countries.

The OHCHR guidance on the right to take part in public affairs also recognises that this right cannot be considered in a vacuum and that it requires

“an environment where all human rights, in particular the rights to equality and non-discrimination, to freedom of opinion and expression and to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, are fully respected and enjoyed by all individuals.”

and that: “the life, physical integrity, liberty, security and privacy of all members of society, including journalists and human rights defenders, be protected at all times.”<sup>68</sup>

Activists, journalists, and others who document and investigate the impacts of firearms on human rights, as well as potential corruption, and collusion between politicians and the gun industry must be able to exercise their rights to freedom of expression and to take part in public affairs free from the risk of reprisals and attacks. Human rights defenders and all civil society actors should also be able to do their work without fear of threats or violence committed with firearms.

## 2) Civil society participation in the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and its national implementation

The United Nations Programme of Action (UNPoA) on the illicit trade of Small Arms and Light Weapons is a politically binding framework for UN member states. However, as this instrument

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<sup>68</sup> OHCHR “Guidelines for States on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs” (20 Juillet 2018) paragraph 14-18. Available at: [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/PublicAffairs/GuidelinesRightParticipatePublicAffairs\\_web.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/PublicAffairs/GuidelinesRightParticipatePublicAffairs_web.pdf)

lacks enforcement mechanisms for compliance, civil society — including women's groups — has played a crucial role in holding governments accountable for their commitments under the UNPoA by monitoring progress and tracking implementation. Civil society has also been instrumental in raising awareness of the consequences of the proliferation of illicit arms flow and has successfully advocated for the inclusion of gender perspectives in UNPoA outcome documents. The latest outcome document from the Fourth Review Conference (RevCon4) recognises gender roles, norms, and expectations for women and men to acquire illicit arms and encourages the engagement and participation of men and boys in mainstreaming a gender perspective into policies and programmes on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW).<sup>69</sup>

The RevCon4 outcome document recognises the important role of civil society and encourages states to coordinate the development and implementation of national action plans and other national policies in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including civil society. It also addresses the need to ensure that related national systems, strategies and policies are coordinated with other relevant instruments such as the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda, the Women Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and United Nations resolutions on women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.

Civil society organisations, including women's groups, frequently face barriers to their participation. For example, opportunities to obtain technical expertise in disarmament have traditionally been acquired via police or military training, two male dominated sectors, resulting in gender imbalances of the field. The often militarised and technical nature of arms control processes has contributed to the lack of meaningful participation of women and nonbinary or gender non-conforming people in disarmament efforts and has often reinforced a militarised and violent approach to security. However, technical jobs in arms controls are increasingly performed by civilians as opposed to

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<sup>69</sup> UN General Assembly “Report of the fourth United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects” (Adopted 28 June) UN Doc A/CONF.192/2024/RC/3 (5 July 2024). Available at: <https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images//documents/Disarmament-fora/salw/revcon2024/documents/final-report.pdf>; Bjertén Emma and Briggs Natalie, “Advancing Gender and Inclusivity in Small Arms Control: Key take aways from RevCon4” (WILPF and GENSAC, 10 December 2024).

experts from security institutions, which constitutes a key opportunity to increase diversity in the field of disarmament.<sup>70</sup>

The traditionally militarised nature of small arms control that has contributed to unbalanced participation has also contributed to the absence of gender perspective in small arms control processes. Technical jargon that is often used in arms controls can also create obstacles for more diverse representation at the national level. In addition, policies focusing on so-called “hard security” issues might not fit with the objectives of civil society organisations including women’s groups. Other factors that specifically limited diverse participation include constrained funding, restricted access to decision-making forums, and in some cases, resistance by national actors to the involvement of civil society and women’s organisations.<sup>71</sup>

Despite these challenges, the RevCon4 outcome document also recognises the need to:

“address the persistent barriers to the full, equal, meaningful and effective participation and representation of women, including in leadership roles, in all decision-making, planning and implementation processes related to the Programme of Action, such as national small arms commissions, programmes relating to community safety, violence reduction, collection and destruction of small arms and light weapons, stockpile management, conflict prevention and resolution and peacebuilding.”

In this way the recent outcome document of the UNPoA shifts the focus from promoting equal opportunities to actively addressing the barriers that prevent women’s active participation in disarmament processes. The RevCon4 outcome document also notes the importance of accessibility in meetings and arms control processes. It specifically mentions the inclusion of

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<sup>70</sup>Hana Salama and Emma Bjertén-Günther, “Women Managing Weapons: Perspectives for Increasing Women’s Meaningful Participation in Weapons and Ammunition Management” (UNIDIR, 27 July 2021).

<sup>71</sup> Bjertén Emma and Briggs Natalie “Advancing Gender and Inclusivity in Small Arms Control: Key take aways from RevCon4” (WILPF and GENSAC, 10 December 2024).

people with disabilities, something that is particularly important regarding instruments on SALW, given the range of disabilities often experienced by people surviving gun violence.<sup>72</sup>

### 3) Civil society participation in the implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty's provisions relevant to firearms

A 2024 WILPF submission to OHCHR provided several national examples of barriers to oversight by civil society, parliaments and courts.<sup>73</sup> Such barriers to access to information related to arms transfers, including about transfers of firearms, also impede the right to take part in public affairs in so far as it applies to arms control regulation. While the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) primarily applies to State-to-State transfers rather than civilian acquisition of firearms, it requires states exporting weapons to assess the risks of serious violations of international human rights law in the recipient state, as well as the risk of diversion of firearms.

Of relevance to the role of civil society, the Preamble of the ATT recognises the:

“the voluntary and active role that civil society, including non-governmental organizations, and industry, can play in raising awareness of the object and purpose of this Treaty, **and in supporting its implementation.**” (emphasis added)

Article 5. 5 of the ATT also provides that

“Each State Party shall take measures necessary to implement the provisions of this Treaty and shall designate competent national authorities in order to have an **effective and transparent national control system** regulating the transfer of conventional arms covered under Article 2 (1) and of items covered under Article 3 and Article 4.” (emphasis added)

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<sup>72</sup>Bjertén Emma and Briggs Natalie “Advancing Gender and Inclusivity in Small Arms Control: Key take aways from RevCon4” (WILPF and GENSAC, 10 December 2024). Available at: <https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/rcw-gensac-paper-.pdf>.

<sup>73</sup> WILPF, “Submission to the call for inputs for the High Commissioner’s report to the Human Rights Council, pursuant to UN Human Rights Council resolution 53/15” (29 January 2024). Available at: [https://www.wilpf.org/advocacy\\_documents/submit-to-ohchr-on-the-role-of-access-to-information-regarding-human-rights-impacts-of-arms-transfers/](https://www.wilpf.org/advocacy_documents/submit-to-ohchr-on-the-role-of-access-to-information-regarding-human-rights-impacts-of-arms-transfers/).

Ensuring civil society and parliamentary oversight, sufficient access to information on transfers of firearms is essential to upholding the right to take part in public affairs in the realm of arms controls. Where transfers of small arms are resulting in violations of the rights of people to participate in public life, or in civilian acquisition and use leading to the violation of these rights, they are in violation of the ATT. Civil society analysis of such situations is critical to the effective implementation of the ATT nationally and globally.

#### 4) Civil society participation in UN human rights mechanisms on issues related to firearms

WILPF Sections, Groups and partners' advocacy including with UN human rights bodies is a pathway to exercise their right to take part in public affairs, by seeking to influence how States regulate small arms and that they take into account their human rights impacts, including their impacts on women's and girls' rights.

The CEDAW Committee's General Recommendation 40 on equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems recommends States to

“(d) Ensure parity and the strict application of WPS in regulation and implementation of arms control, including-proliferation of weapons and disarmament, including the urgent disarmament of all nuclear weapons.”<sup>74</sup>

WILPF does not advocate for the inclusion of women or LGBTQ+ people in militaristic structures such as the army, police or the security sector. Instead, we call for a change to the systems of war and conflict and a reinterpretation of security rooted in the respect, protection and fulfillment of all human rights and the means to ensure sustainable peace. At the same time, WILPF recognises that the perspectives and experiences of those impacted by firearms must effectively inform responses

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<sup>74</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Discriminations against Women “General recommendation No.40 on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems” UN Doc CEDAW/C/GC/40 (25 October 2024) paragraph 61 d). Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-recommendation-no-40-equal-and-inclusive>.

to regulate and control firearms, and to provide remedies for victims of firearm-related violence, including as part of their right to take part in public affairs.

In addition, as stated in a WILPF's submission regarding the CEDAW Committee's General Recommendation 40,

“Participation is closely linked to the enjoyment of all other human rights. Assessing the measures that need to be taken to secure this right therefore requires not only an analysis of the obstacles women face at the individual level when they seek to participate in public and political life, but also an approach that goes beyond individual “empowerment” to address the structural barriers and policies that impede women’s participation, including in the economic and social spheres.”<sup>75</sup>

For the past decade, WILPF's section in the Democratic Republic of Congo (WILPF DRC) has brought to the CEDAW Committee advocacy demands for women's groups' participation and a gender-responsive approach in the development of regulation, policies and institutions to address small arms proliferation. In 2013, WILPF DRC first brought to the attention of the CEDAW Committee the impacts of small arms on the prevalence of sexual violence against women and girls.<sup>76</sup> Since then, WILPF DRC has also advocated for the effective integration of a gender-sensitive approach into the DRC's National Action Plan on small arms and light weapons (2018-2022) and has also raised these issues in various domestic and international forums, including in the reviews of the DRC by the Universal Periodic Review and by the CEDAW Committee in 2019<sup>77</sup>.

A 2021 joint submission to the CEDAW Committee's pre-session on Italy by Fondazione Pangea Onlus - REAMA network, WILPF Italy and three other organisations underscores, among other

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<sup>75</sup> WILPF, “Submission to the CEDAW Committee’s Half-day general discussion on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems” (14 February 2023). Available at: <https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/WILPF-submission-CEDAW-GR-participation.pdf>.

<sup>76</sup> WILPF, “Statement to the CEDAW Committee for the Review of the DRC” (14 July 2013) Available at: [https://www.wilpf.org/advocacy\\_documents/statement-from-wilpf-democratic-republic-of-congo-to-the-cedaw-committee/](https://www.wilpf.org/advocacy_documents/statement-from-wilpf-democratic-republic-of-congo-to-the-cedaw-committee/)

<sup>77</sup> WILPF DRC, “From Local to Global Accountability, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Analysis of Implementation of Recommendations From International Human Rights Mechanisms” (18 January 2023) page 20, Available at: [https://www.wilpf.org/advocacy\\_documents/from-local-to-global-accountability-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-analysis-of-implementation-of-recommendations-from-international-human-rights-mechanisms/](https://www.wilpf.org/advocacy_documents/from-local-to-global-accountability-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-analysis-of-implementation-of-recommendations-from-international-human-rights-mechanisms/)

things, the critical link between firearms, gender-based violence, and femicides in Italy.<sup>78</sup> It highlights, providing data, that firearm possession, particularly within family settings, is a significant risk factor for femicide and domestic violence. The submission also raised concerns about recent legislative changes that loosen regulations on firearm acquisition and use, potentially increasing the risks of firearm-related violence against women. These concerns were further elaborated in a WILPF's submission to the same pre-session, which, among other things, emphasised that the presence of firearms in households heightens the risk of non-lethal gender-based violence, such as intimidation and psychological violence, while negatively impacting women's equality and bargaining power.<sup>79</sup> It also highlighted the need for integrating gender perspectives into national firearms regulations and addressing systemic issues like the accessibility of firearms and the lack of gender-disaggregated data.

With the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, WILPF Cameroon has advocated for the establishment of a national commission on small arms and light weapons, for the integration of arms-related impacts in Cameroon's national action plan on UN Security Council resolution 1325, as well as for the ratification of relevant arms control instruments by Cameroon.<sup>80</sup>

In a 2023 submission to the Universal Periodic Review,<sup>81</sup> WILPF Nigeria highlighted, among other concerns, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and their connection to harmful and militarised masculinities. The submission emphasised how the widespread availability of firearms contributes to violence, particularly in the context of elections, and called for measures to address

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<sup>78</sup> Fondazione Pangea Onlus - REAMA network, UDI - Unione Donne in Italia, Associazione Nazionale Volontarie Telefono Rosa Onlus, WILPF Italia "Joint submission to the UN CEDAW Committee 80th Pre-sessional Working Group (March 2021) LOIPR of ITALY" (February 2021). Available at [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCEDAW%2FICS%2FITA%2F44344&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCEDAW%2FICS%2FITA%2F44344&Lang=en).

<sup>79</sup> WILPF, "Submission to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 8th (virtual) pre-sessional Working Group (1-5 March 2021). List of issues prior to reporting (LOIPR) of Italy". Available at : [https://www.wilpf.org/advocacy\\_documents/submission-to-the-cedaw-committee-pre-session-on-italy/](https://www.wilpf.org/advocacy_documents/submission-to-the-cedaw-committee-pre-session-on-italy/)

<sup>80</sup> WILPF Cameroon, "Women's economic and social rights in Cameroon" (January 2019).Available at: [https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Cameroon-CESCR\\_EN.pdf](https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Cameroon-CESCR_EN.pdf)

<sup>81</sup> WILPF, "Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Nigeria" (18 July 2023). Available at: [https://www.wilpf.org/advocacy\\_documents/submission-to-the-upr-of-nigeria/](https://www.wilpf.org/advocacy_documents/submission-to-the-upr-of-nigeria/). See also, WILPF Nigeria, "HRC56: Statement on the UPR of Nigeria" (5 July 2024). Available at: [https://www.wilpf.org/advocacy\\_documents/hrc56-statement-on-the-upr-of-nigeria/](https://www.wilpf.org/advocacy_documents/hrc56-statement-on-the-upr-of-nigeria/).

these issues. Among other measures, it recommended that Nigeria endorse and commit to implementing the African Union's Kinshasa Declaration on Positive Masculinities and Ending Violence against Women and Girls.

## 5) Civil society participation on issues related to firearms and the Women, Peace and Security agenda

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda recognises the importance of addressing the impacts of armed conflict on women and girls and outlines key areas of action under four main issue areas (pillars): protection, participation, prevention, relief and recovery. Firearms are of relevance to all these pillars, in terms of protection from gender-based violence, prevention of future violence, inhibitions of women's participation in public life, and the ability of communities and individuals to recover from armed conflicts. The WPS agenda calls for the participation of women in disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration efforts, and several of the WPS resolutions adopted by the UN Security Council also make explicit links between the agenda and weapons issues. It is notable that small arms and light weapons is the only disarmament and arms control issue that figures into the WPS agenda, where other weapon-related issues are largely absent.<sup>82</sup>

One of the WPS-related resolutions (UN Security Council Resolution 2122) acknowledged the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty and its provisions in Article 7(4) which outline that exporting states should take into account the risk that their arms exports will be used to facilitate gender-based violence.<sup>83</sup> It also recognised the contribution of the ATT in reducing violence in conflict and post-conflict situations and urged states and the UN to ensure women's participation in eradicating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons (SALW). UN Security Council Resolution 2242 encouraged the participation of women in the “design and implementation of efforts related to the prevention, combating and eradication of the illicit transfer, and the destabilizing accumulation

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<sup>82</sup> WILPF “UNSCR 1325 At 20 Years: Perspectives From Feminist Peace Activists and Civil Society” (October 2020). Available at: [https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/WILPF\\_UNSCR-1325-at-20-Years\\_Web.pdf](https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/WILPF_UNSCR-1325-at-20-Years_Web.pdf)?

<sup>83</sup> UN Security Council “Resolution 2122 (2013)” UN Doc S/RES/2122 (18 October 2013). Available at: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n13/523/44/pdf/n1352344.pdf>.

and misuse of small arms and light weapons".<sup>84</sup> This latter resolution also makes connections between WPS and other policy areas.

There are numerous examples where national policy frameworks on WPS demonstrate promising practices in terms of connection between the Women, Peace and Security agenda and disarmament and arms control, even where these linkages do not always exist in the Security Council resolutions themselves. Many WILPF Sections and Groups are active in their countries in efforts to advocate for the inclusion of disarmament and arms control provisions in National Action Plans, including in Cameroon, the DRC, Colombia, and Italy.

Some examples of countries that incorporated language on disarmament and SALW into past National Action Plans on WPS include Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the DRC, Liberia, and Albania. Examples of activities in this regard span across national and local implementation efforts. For example, some activities in Belgium's 2017-2021 NAP on WPS include ensuring compliance with Article 7.4 of the ATT, supporting the participation of women in the fight against illegal trafficking of SALW, and promoting gender-based approaches in the joint positions of the European Council regarding disarmament.<sup>85</sup>

The 2018-2022 NAP on WPS of Bosnia and Herzegovina include recommendations to amend the regulations governing the licensing for possession of weapons, with the goal of preventing those with a history of violence from accessing weapons.<sup>86</sup> Liberia's NAP on WPS also addresses the issue of small arms and light weapons and its connection to trafficking, focusing on how SALW facilitate sexual abuse and exploitation.<sup>87</sup>

The 2019-2022 NAP on WPS of the DRC states government's commitments to organise knowledge exchange workshops between people who worked on the NAP, the National Commission for the

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<sup>84</sup> UN Security Council "Resolution 2242 (2015)" UN Doc S/RES/2242 (13 October 2015), paragraph 15. Available at: [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_res\\_2242.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2242.pdf).

<sup>85</sup> Center for International Security Studies, The University of Sydney "Belgium National Action Plan" (Accessed on 15 January 2025). Available at: <https://www.wpsnaps.org/nap/belgian-national-action-plan-iii/>

<sup>86</sup> Center for International Security Studies, The University of Sydney "Bosnia and Herzegovina National Action Plan" (Accessed on 15 January 2025). Available at <https://www.wpsnaps.org/nap/bosnia-and-herzegovina-national-action-plan-i/>

<sup>87</sup> Center for International Security Studies, The University of Sydney "Liberia National Action Plan" (Accessed on 15 January 2025). Available at <https://www.wpsnaps.org/nap/liberia-national-action-plan-i/>

Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons and the Reduction of Armed Violence, and amnesty campaigns to recover SALW.<sup>88</sup> Ghana’s 2020-2025 NAP on WPS includes an activity to discuss and develop a roadmap for reviewing firearms and ammunition laws from a gender perspective.<sup>89</sup>

Albania’s 2018-2020 NAP on WPS included an activity on raising awareness among women and girls of weapons collection and proliferation, in violation of their national laws in this regard. This activity also included a component on women and girls campaigning for weapons collection.<sup>90</sup> In Sudan’s 2020-2022 NAP on WPS, there were several activities on weapons and mines from a gender perspective. There was one activity on mobilising the community in conflict areas to design weapons collection programs with the participation of women.<sup>91</sup>

Several states include activities and commitments related to ensuring civil society and particularly women’s participation in small arms control and disarmament, at the local, national, and international levels, for instance in national action plans on Women, Peace and Security, as seen above. Despite this, these commitments are not always sufficiently implemented or financed, and do not always translate into the adoption of actual gender-responsive regulation and/or in gender-responsive implementation of arms controls.

For the 20th anniversary of the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 1325, WILPF conducted a series of consultations across our membership and global network. One of the issues that was identified in terms of implementation was the issue of cherry-picking. In the words of a researcher from Belgium, “The WPS agenda is a strong framework; however, we still see UN Member States picking and choosing which aspects best suit their national interests rather than adopting a holistic approach that would also address hard-hitting issues like defunding the arms industry.”<sup>92</sup> A

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<sup>88</sup> Center for International Security Studies, The University of Sydney “Democratic Republic of the Congo National Action Plan” (Accessed on 15 January 2025). Available at <https://www.wpsnaps.org/nap/drc-national-action-plan-i/>

<sup>89</sup> Center for International Security Studies, The University of Sydney “Afghanistan National Action Plan” (Accessed on 15 January 2025). Available at: <https://www.wpsnaps.org/nap/ghanaiian-national-action-plan-i/>

<sup>90</sup> Center for International Security Studies, The University of Sydney “Albania National Action Plan” (Accessed on 15 January 2025). Available at: <https://www.wpsnaps.org/nap/albanian-national-action-plan/>

<sup>91</sup> Republic of the Sudan “National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security - 2020 2022” (March 2020). Available at: <https://www.wpsnaps.org/app/uploads/2022/12/Sudan-NAP-1-2020-2022.pdf>

<sup>92</sup> WILPF “UNSCR 1325 At 20 Years: Perspectives From Feminist Peace Activists and Civil Society” (October 2020) page 10. Available at: [https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/WILPF\\_UNSCR-1325-at-20-Years\\_Web.pdf](https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/WILPF_UNSCR-1325-at-20-Years_Web.pdf)

member from WILPF Germany reported that those with expertise on and interest in disarmament are often excluded from discussions in WPS, in many contexts.

### **III. Firearms' impacts on children's rights to participate in public and cultural life**

In 2021 submission<sup>93</sup> to OHCHR for the report on civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms by children and youth, WILPF reported, among other things, that:

“Testimonies from WILPF Sections and partners surveyed offer some concrete examples of how specific human rights are impacted. All of them affirmed that the acquisition, possession, and use of firearms by children and youth present significant challenges in the contexts that they are working on, including Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, Colombia, Cameroon, Palestine, and Lebanon. Specifically, WILPF Cameroon said that armed youth deprive other people, including other youth of a vast range of human rights. It stressed that firearms possession and use by children and youth impacts on individuals' right to political participation during electoral processes, either as voters or as candidates. A few of these cases have also been documented by Human Rights Watch. Similarly, in relation to the right to political participation, WILPF partners in Syria observed that “the voice of truth and democracy is lowered, while the voice of firearms and its power is the one that is heard.”<sup>94</sup>

“As WILPF's Syrian partners noted, a peer's possession of a firearm causes fear, anxiety, and trauma in other children. This has long-term repercussions for children's lives. The World Health Organisation (WHO) also stresses that youth violence “has a serious, often lifelong, impact on a person's physical, psychological and social functioning.” In the US, where school shootings are widespread, statistics show that children and youth have a greater risk of experiencing emotional trauma following the event. As the US-based

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<sup>93</sup> WILPF, “Submission for the report on civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms by children and youth mandated by Human Rights Council resolution 45/13” (19 October 2021).

<sup>94</sup> WILPF, “Submission for the report on civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms by children and youth mandated by Human Rights Council resolution 45/13” (19 October 2021) page 4.

organisation The Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence finds, studies of children exposed to sudden, unexpected acts of mass violence have reported post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) rates of up to 100 per cent. A comprehensive analysis of American children who experience gun violence at school reinforces findings that these children have higher rates of school absenteeism, lower high school and college graduation rates, and earn lower incomes by their mid-twenties.

The impacts of youth owning and using firearms are devastating for their own lives, too, contributing to children’s and youth’s further marginalisation, as noted by WILPF Colombia, including through lack of employment opportunities, early parenthood, lack of education, and long-term impacts on youth’s behaviour and attitudes that are based upon domination and violence. Syrian partners explained that a child owning a gun is ostracised by their peers because of fear of the child’s actions. All of these consequences mean that children and youth find their human rights to education, to rest and leisure, and to engage in play and recreational activities affected by the possession of a firearm, whether they themselves are the owner or in regular contact with another youth who is. The above case studies confirm empirical evidence and complement existing research by WILPF on the human rights impacts of arms proliferation, as described earlier in this submission.”

## **ANNEX I: Excerpts from Ray Acheson’s article ‘Autonomous Weapons and Patriarchy’<sup>95</sup>**

“Patriarchy is a system of power. It is, in the barest sense, a hierarchical social order in which women are subordinate to men. But it is more than that. It is an order that shapes and entrenches gender as a cultural construction. It insists upon norms, roles, and conditions of being a “man” and a “woman”. It thus oppresses not just women but anyone that does not conform to norms of their prescribed gender or to the gender binary: this includes men who do not abide by the cultural

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<sup>95</sup> WILPF, Ray Acheson, “Autonomous weapons and patriarchy” (October 2020) available at: <https://automatedresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/aws-and-patriarchy-1.pdf>

expectations of “masculinity,” as well as gender non-conforming, non-binary, intersex, and trans people.

As bell hooks says, patriarchy is not only “a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females,” but it is a system that endows the hegemonic male “with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence.”

Patriarchy celebrates a certain form of masculinity, namely, a “particular idealized image of masculinity in relation to which images of femininity and other masculinities are marginalized and subordinated.” In most cultures today, this “hegemonic masculinity” is represented by a heterosexual cisgender man who makes claims to being independent, risk-taking, aggressive, rational, physically tough, courageous, and unemotional.

The military plays a primary role in shaping images of masculinity in the larger society, to the point where “the dominant adult male role model could largely be the product of the military.” Primacy in the military was, and still is, awarded to “toughness, skilled use of violence, presumption of an enemy, male camaraderie, submerging one’s emotions, and discipline (being disciplined and demanding it of others).”

Militarised masculinities are produced in various sites, including through the policies of states, security discourses, education, media debates, popular culture, and family relations. Boys and men are in particular socialised into militarised gender identities—and others are socialised to support this. Boys come to learn—through parenting, media, and schooling—to define themselves as men through violence. The norms of hegemonic masculinities—toughness, strength, bravado—teach boys to exercise dominance through violent acts and rely upon violence as a form of communication.

The dominant form of militarised masculinity is not universal. But militarised masculinities are embedded within the institutions of violence and perpetuate that culture beyond these institutions. For example, military institutions engage actively in the processes of differentiating and “othering” that reinforces the ideal of gendered hierarchies. Turning men into warfighters requires breaking down their sense of ethics and morals and building up a violent masculinity that is lacking in

empathy and glorifies strength as violence and physical domination over others portrayed as weaker. Hierarchy is fundamental to military training. Teaching human beings to kill other human beings “requires dehumanizing others by promoting the belief that another human is somehow a ‘lesser’ creature,” Cynthia Enloe explains. “One of the central forms of dehumanization promoted by military training and the culture of daily life in the military has been the supposed inferiority of women—that women are less than men.”

## **Annex II: Excerpts from Ray Acheson’s article ‘Gun Violence and the Marketing of Militarism’<sup>96</sup>**

“In the United States, white Christian nationalists in particular are using these forums spread messages of patriarchal protection of their families from leftist ideology and “groomers” as much as from household intruders. Many are reconstructions that want to reconfigure the United States. They frame the “right” to bear arms in terms of nationalism and national identity. The Second Amendment, which originally was about the right of militias to possess weapons to defend against potential governmental tyranny, is now—thanks to deliberate work from the gun industry—widely viewed as confirming an individual’s right to bear arms. The gun lobby also codes tyranny as a government that protects Black and Brown people or LGBTQ+ people and that does not exclusively service white men.

But this phenomenon is not limited to the United States. Interestingly, as those at the meeting from Brazil, South Africa, Serbia, and other countries noted, Second Amendment-type arguments are used by gun rights organizations and by gun industries, even though there is nothing even remotely similar in their constitutions. Having helped create the entwinement of racial and national identity with gun ownership, weapon manufacturers then amplify narratives and myths about guns being taken away from people by the state, which helps drive their profits even further. These companies actively spread conspiracy theories about gun control and support politicians who construct these narratives. The gun industry often collaborates with gunfluencers that explicitly appeal to

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<sup>96</sup>Ray Acheson, “Gun violence and the marketing of militarism” (Counterpunch, 28 July 2024). Available at: <https://www.counterpunch.org/2024/07/28/gun-violence-and-the-marketing-of-militarism/>

extremists through increasingly militarized weapons and stories about cabals coopting the country's democratic institutions and demonizing white men.

This victim narrative, and the idea that white men are entitled to have power over everyone else, meshes importantly with the concept of the right to bear arms. This inevitably leads to the legitimization and even normalization of political violence when men perceive these rights as being challenged. Analysis of those arrested for the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the US capital has focused on race, highlighting that most participants, about 93%, were white. But also, 86% of those arrested were men. Their identity as men was mobilized to defend "white culture" and the "homeland" through violence. And, analogous to domestic violence where men use force to control or punish their partners, the January 6 riots came in response to the loss of an election."