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Armed violence and the MDGs

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. Mr. President.

Armed violence may be hard to define, but it is easy to recognize.

Millions of people are witness to the horrific consequences of armed violence every day. They are touched - as observers, as perpetrators and victims.

Each year, more than 740,000 people die as a result of armed violence - that's at least one person a minute. Most of these people dying are killed due to small arms, especially pistols and revolvers. The UN Programme of Action is an important mechanism to constructively address the problem of armed violence.

Whether in a war zone or in an inner city neighborhood, it is young males who will do most of the killing and dying. And it is more than likely that women, will end up carrying a large share of the burden. Victims and survivors are often traumatized and will pass on their sorrow and the weight of the past to their children. Over time, the value of life itself may become degraded.

So what causes armed violence? Why do some places experience more severe forms of violence than others? We are learning that it is the combination of many factors, rather than one factor alone, which increases the risk of violence breaking out.

It is also clear that the factors shaping armed violence are often the very same as the causes of underdevelopment including, income and social inequality, chronic unemployment, uneven access to resources, unregulated urbanization, and various forms of marginalization.

It is important that we recognise that the relationship between armed violence and development is a two-way street. Not only does under-development contribute to armed violence, but armed violence is also a major disabler of development.

Mr President

There is no safety without development. And development can't be sustainable without security.

More and more states are starting to make this connection. Since 2006, over 100 countries have acknowledged the linkages between armed violence and development by signing the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development. Likewise the Oslo Commitments on Armed Violence, agreed in May by more than 60 countries, The UN Secretary General's Report "Achieving Development through Armed Violence Reduction" in 2009, and his 2010 report "Keeping the Promise", are all calls to action.

But this is just the beginning. The review summit for the Millennium Development Goals offers a real opportunity to begin seriously tackling the causes and consequences of armed violence and underdevelopment. If states are serious about reaching MDG targets by 2015, they need to make real demonstrable progress in also preventing and reducing armed violence.

Over the last 2 days civil society has had the opportunity to input to the preparatory process for the UN Summit on the MDGs here at the United Nations. A central role for civil society, working alongside states is welcome and essential. Community based organizations, including many IANSA members, have tremendous experience in supporting violence prevention programmes and projects at the grassroots. They are focusing not just on removing the tools of violence from circulation, but also on reshaping the motivations and means that give rise to violent behaviour. Involved in literally thousands of highly effective activities around the world, they are a major resource to be tapped and scaled-up.

Mr President

In closing, let me quickly set out some basic steps for UN member states and their partners in our joint fight against armed violence. These are essential preconditions in many countries to achieving the MDGs.

- Step 1. Develop comprehensive strategies that focus on the family
- Step 2. Invest in youth, especially on improving their life skills and opportunities
- Step 3. Promote gender equality and empowerment
- Step 4. Improve social welfare systems
- Step 5. Support local conflict mediation
- Step 6. Reduce income inequality and urban and rural poverty
- Step 7. Strengthen criminal justice systems
- Step 8. Control alcohol, drugs and guns

And, ultimately we need to invest in peace. States must have the courage to take these basic steps. And we, civil society, are ready to assist you in these tasks.

Thank you, Mr. President