NGO Presentations
Speaker: Jasmine Galace, Philippines (English)

Madame. President Ambassador Joy Ogwu,

On behalf of the global IANSA community, which the next two speakers and I represent, please receive our congratulations for your election. You can count on civil society’s support towards a meaningful conclusion of this Review Conference.

Dear delegates,

It is an honour to present the perspective of civil society organizations that witness the daily tragedies caused by firearms violence. These organisations undertake many efforts on the ground, including work related to the Program of Action.

Let us take a step back and remind ourselves of why we are here in the first place. The PoA was not developed because countries were “gravely concerned” about the illicit trade in small arms per se, but rather because they were “determined to reduce the human suffering caused by” this illicit trade. We hope you continue to possess such determination, as the unspeakable human suffering caused by small arms and light weapons has seemingly not diminished.

IANSA urges governments in their PoA assessments to pay greater attention to the humanitarian impact and human cost of firearms violence and its connections with the trade in weapons. The deaths and injuries caused by gun violence are well established; whether occurring in armed conflict, gang violence, drug-related, organized or common crime, hundreds of thousands of people are injured or lose their lives every year. Countless more have their homes and communities destroyed, or endure forms of violence in the home.

The PoA should therefore be seen as an important tool that must contribute to preventing, combating, and attempting to eradicate the deadly effects of the illicit trade and misuse of SALW. As such, special attention is needed to its track record and potential to assist vulnerable groups, individuals and communities that have already been victimized through the misuse of SALW, or are at imminent risk of facing gun violence. It is therefore essential to prioritize action that focuses on children and youth, victims and survivors, and the gender dimensions of armed violence.

In addition to suffering disproportionately from the effects of firearms violence, children and youth have increasingly become actors in the illicit use of guns and in perpetrating armed violence. Steps must be taken within the framework of the PoA to promote initiatives for child and youth focused disarmament, and governments should increase efforts to discourage youths’ use of arms, during and after armed conflicts, and in other violent contexts such as those gangs and organized crime.

Likewise, it is essential to consider the rights of victims of SALW violence when discussing the impacts of the illicit trade in such weapons, including a holistic approach to assistance and active participation in the production, implementation and supervision of local, national, regional and international measures to prevent SALW trafficking and misuse. Emphasis should be placed on families and communities as indirect victims of firearms violence, as well as all relevant socioeconomic and cultural implications. Also, DDR programs should be accompanied by community-oriented victim assistance in post-conflict settings.
Finally, there are specific gender dimensions to the impacts of SALW proliferation. To be consistent with the broader UN practice of mainstreaming gender in all frameworks, policies and programs, the PoA should recognize the specific impact of the illicit spread of small arms and light weapons on women (and on men). The presence of SALW facilitates and perpetuates gender-based violence, including sexual violence, although it is rarely women who use, own or transfer these weapons.

It is critical that PoA implementation directly address this reality by incorporating gendered language, and encouraging women’s participation in all phases of implementation, in order to help influence laws and policies that will ultimately protect women (and men). Also, attention should be paid to understanding the linkages between guns and masculinity, with the active participation of women and men as stakeholders, more specifically in military and law-enforcement agencies.

Dear delegates,

It has been rightly noted that after more than a decade in existence, the PoA comes to a “crossroads” at this RevCon, and we urge governments to look back with clear and critical eyes to seriously scrutinize the instrument’s achievements and limitations.

We know the PoA has served as a framework, catalyst or inspiration for many important efforts, especially national and sub-regional gun control legislation and technical measures (stockpile security, marking, destruction, etc.). In this regard, we take note of the many programmes and projects which regional organizations and states have spoken of in your statements so far. Despite this positive evidence, it remains unclear whether, or how much, the PoA has impacted levels of gun violence, be it on a national, regional or global basis.

My colleagues will refer to these concerns shortly, but in looking back at the last decade of the PoA, I would like to touch on a few particularly noteworthy limitations. One is the quality of PoA reports. As noted in a recent UNIDIR study, “…many of the explanations provided by states in their national reports as to why they are unable to implement the PoA lack specificity and give an incomplete picture of implementation challenges, suggesting that many states are struggling to identify the specific challenges they face. It is difficult to identify opportunities for addressing challenges to implementation if states themselves have not pinpointed or described in greater detail the specific reasons for their difficulty in implementing certain PoA commitments”.

Also lacking has been the ‘quantity’ of reports. In its March 2012 “Review of National Reports”, the Small Arms Survey notes that from the PoA’s adoption to the end of 2011, 35 States had not submitted a single report, 26 states only one – and more than half of the States that have issued reports have done so four or less times. Only 19 countries have reported more than six times, and only two the maximum possible nine reports.

Despite these unfulfilled commitments, we are not here today to bemoan what could have been. We make this assessment in order to share our thoughts on what we must do – now and in the near future – to overcome these obstacles. It is only with a clear, evidence-based diagnosis that one can offer detailed and effective prescriptions to treat a certain “disease”. As such, the following speakers will offer suggestions on what governments can do regarding PoA implementation – in the coming ten days – and beyond.

Thank you very much.