

Introduction:

The Caribbean Coalition for Development and the Reduction of Armed Violence wishes to express its appreciation for availing our organization of the opportunity to share our perspective on this issue. The Coalition is a civil society group effort to address the crisis of armed violence in the Caribbean and its effects on development. Its objectives are as follows:

- *To mobilize civil society partners throughout the region around the issue of armed violence*
- *To advocate for policy reform on armed violence.*
- *To be the leading research organization in the region on development and armed violence.*

CDRAV has also campaigned to raise awareness about the social impact of gun violence and conducted research and analysis on the existence and effects of legislation and policies introduced to reduce and prevent armed violence.

Member States are Antigua and Barbuda; Belize; Dominica; Dominican Republic; Grenada; Guyana; Haiti; Jamaica; St Kitts; St Lucia; St Vincent and the Grenadines; Trinidad and Tobago; Turks and Caicos and Venezuela.

Impacts:

The availability of small arms has an important role in raising the level and deadliness of violence in society and impacting upon the development of the region. Much of the response to this has resided in the criminal centred approach. The issue of crime and violence and armed violence must however be addressed at multiple levels.

Armed criminality is costly to economic activity. The estimates for the economic impact of violence include medical costs, indemnification, the cost of the justice system (trials, prison system costs, etc.), and indirect costs, like the loss of productivity by the injured.¹

Some heightened levels of violence affect not only direct forms of human, social and economic activity but also have repercussions in the loss of confidence by potential investors. This is extremely worrying for all of our small island states,

¹ Impact of armed violence on youth and an intervention model created by Daniel Luz - *An exclusive article for the monthly newsletter "En la mira - The Latin American Small Arms Watch."*

whether we are heavily dependent on tourism, the financial services sector or the energy sector. Escalating violence has meant a diversion of, in some instances, already limited government resources to address the problem. So that crime prevention programs and poverty reduction measures could struggle to attract the same level of public sector financing that previously may have been allocated to them. There is a direct impact on quality of life, productivity, the cost of goods and services, the value of property, investment and industry. The misuse of small arms causes death and injury to thousands of people in our region every year; it destroys livelihoods and promotes cultures of fear and terror.

Deaths and injuries from violence constitute a major public health challenge. The cost of treating firearm injuries can be exceedingly high. An Exercise to Estimate the Costs of Violence in Jamaica in 2006 revealed that the direct medical costs in 2006 totalled 2.1 billion Jamaican dollars (J\$) for injuries from interpersonal violence. Indirect medical costs for injuries due to interpersonal violence in 2006 totalled J\$27.5 billion. WINAD is attempting a similar study in Trinidad and Tobago and through the Caribbean Coalition for Development and the Reduction of Armed Violence (CDRAV) hopes that several other countries will also pursue this course.

Violence and particularly, armed violence has significant and disastrous impact on our social structures in terms of family and community cohesion, gender relations and other traditional institutions. The decrease and in some instances, loss of social and community cohesion, leaves a significant part of the population incapacitated to address other human security issues and to organize collectively to find meaningful and non-violent dependent solutions. For some residents, and perhaps they are in the minority, there is an option to relocate, for many that option simply does not exist.

In April 2009 at a 2-day Regional Conference hosted by WINAD in Trinidad, the representative of the Kingston and St Andrew Action Forum (KSAAF) noted that there are two types of violence impacting women in Jamaica: Gang violence or Community violence and Gender-based violence"

"In most of the low-income urban communities, women who are intimately involved with "dons" and "shottas" have no other options but to carry and conceal weapons for these men and in some instances, have to wash their blood-stained clothes. All of which must be done without refusal as refusal could be extremely dangerous for

them. These women also become targets for opposing gangs in times of conflict. In these inner-city communities the “dons” are most times considered in a favourable light as their presence signifies protection. They can request whatever service they require from members of the community, such as sexual favours, which most times are acquired from teenagers. The mothers usually comply for three main reasons – saying no could result in their death or serious injury; the “dons” are usually responsible for providing and contributing to the well-being of their families; these cases are not reported because of distrust of law enforcement officers. It is believed that many of them are on the dons’ payrolls.”

In Haiti the history of violence and gun violence is distinctly related to the situation of political crisis in the country. Small arms are a destabilizing force and have become easily accessible to various factions and militias, as well as to criminal gangs and civilians. The large quantity of small arms in circulation increases criminal activities and human rights abuses, including sexual violence. Armed groups are responsible for the majority of incidents, in particular violence against women and girls.

(Possible Omission) In 2006, the United Nations estimated that up to 50% of girls living in areas characterized by high levels of violence where most men have guns, like Cite Soleil have been raped and that in Carrefour and Martissant areas of Port-au-Prince and the town of Les Cayes, gang rapes were common. In February 2007, 50 cases of rape were reported in a 3-day period in Port-Au-Prince. Another alarming trend is the high incidence of these incidents by groups of armed men. Rape is a common practice among criminal gangs. The prevailing state of lawlessness and lack of public security enables such high incidence of sexual abuse.²

Women's organizations and other NGOs working in support of the victims have seen a rising number of rape complaints of this type and a rising number of complaints of these incidents occurring in the victim's homes. The consequences are "numerous, deep and painful," with the violence impacting victims psychologically, medically and economically.

In Belize, perpetrators and victims continue to be largely youth between ages 15-30 who are from the lower end of the socio-economic strata and are largely unemployed or underemployed. The increase in crime has largely been drug and

² Ibid

gang related with youth, women and children being the most affected. The gang problem has been greatly influenced by the return of deported nationals and the high incidence of unemployment and a general lack of opportunities for youth. Murders in Belize continue to increase. Of the 103 murders in 2008, 6 were women and while they do not number significantly among the victims, the emotional and financial responsibility which falls to them singly has a significant impact on them and their children.³

In Jamaica, over the past ten years, over 10,000 men (mostly youth) have been killed in violent circumstances. The tragic loss of one of Jamaica's most precious resources is compounded by the thousands more who have survived violence, but are injured maimed and traumatized. The Ministry of Health's Report on Violence-Related Injuries for the period January to December 2008 revealed that 1,072 persons (939 males and 133 females) have been treated at public hospitals for gunshot wounds.⁴

In St. Vincent and the Grenadines over sixty (60) cases, including 15 murder matters were down for hearing at the criminal assizes in January, 2009. This may seem a small number, but is a significant percentage in a country that has a population of 10,000 persons. Out of a total of 5,654 crimes, there were 23 murders in 2008, 38 robberies and 583 woundings. Fifteen murders resulted from gun violence. At the end of January, 2009, there were two murders resulting from gun violence. Most deaths are of young men 25-30 years, and women in the 21-55 age group. Perpetrators are young men 25-30 years and adult men over 40 years.

Non-governmental community-based organizations play a vital role in addressing crime and armed violence in the society. Women's groups engage the Police and social workers in Domestic Violence Intervention/Prevention Training, since many crimes are committed against women in their homes. Angry partners prefer to shoot, kill or wound women who wish to leave the abusive environment. In 2007, the number of homicides committed reached unprecedented heights, which caused the St. Vincent Government to look for ways to combat the surging crime rate.

³ Presentation entitled: Women and Armed Violence in Belize - Impact and Response - April 2009 - Dianne Finnegan, Director, Youth for the Future, Belize - WINAD 2-day Regional Conference in Trinidad and Tobago "Women Talking with Women: Crime and Violence in the Caribbean"

⁴ KSAAF Presentation entitled: Influencing the Discourse on Armed Violence: Raising Women's Voices - April 2009 - WINAD 2-day Regional Conference in Trinidad and Tobago "Women Talking with Women: Crime and Violence in the Caribbean"

In Venezuela, every half of an hour a fatality results from gun violence. Amnesty International estimates that there are six million guns in the hands of civilians; 4.5 million are illegal and 1.5 million are legal. According to official statistics in 2006, there were 13,000 gun-related fatalities. The typical victims of gun violence are men, aged 17-24 years who come from the poorest parts of the country. As elsewhere, women and children are impacted psychologically and women are more often than not left with the sole responsibility of providing for their families after the deaths of their partners. In Venezuela, young boys, who are left fatherless, often believe that it is their responsibility to take care of their families and so seek to acquire guns to earn a living and to protect their families.

The threads of experience of violence and armed violence are similar throughout the region. From November 2008 to April 2009, the Women's Institute for Alternative Development undertook a project entitled: "*Empowering Women and Girls to Prevent and Address the Impact of Small Arms and Light Weapons in 10 communities in Trinidad & Tobago*". This project aimed to fill a void for evidence-based research and planning on the impact of small arms and light weapons on women and children and communities at large which currently exists.

The Women's Conversations brought to the fore impacts on four different levels. At a personal level women articulated the following: *the fear of going out and returning late, the fear, as single mothers, of having relationships with men (fear of incest and other violent activity), experiencing the trauma of being an eye witness to fatal armed violence, the fear of intervening in situations of violence, the loss of the right to be free, feelings of hopelessness, the disruption of daily routines, the vulnerability of being women, desensitization to the issue, paranoia, the reality of children becoming orphans.*

At the level of their households they noted *the need for increased security in homes leading to increased and unexpected costs, the reality of becoming prisoners in their own homes, the desire to change residence, the need to send children abroad to study.*

At community level armed violence and criminality have led to *the stigmatization of their communities, increasing incidents of both young persons and the elderly being forced to lie face down on hot pitch during law enforcement initiatives, the decision by persons in the community to remain silent, high risk communities not being served with simple amenities, the creation of border lines because of gang conflict, the isolation of some women within the communities.*

And finally, at the level of the State and other institutions they expressed the view that *there is political and institutional inability to deal with the issue, the loss of*

confidence in the capacity of the systems to protect victims, the inability of the Government to keep its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention for the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The inappropriateness of the education system was explored at one session. This proved to be a pointed contribution, because it was steeped in the language of the rights of children which is not common in the approach of the community to the needs of the young.

The Conversations revealed that women do not often see themselves as victims of violence. They are often more focused on the impacts on their children.

One group that stood out in terms of the type of answers given were the girls from the St. Jude's Home for Girls, a residential facility for girls many of whom have either been victims or perpetrators of violence. They identified violence coming from unwanted pregnancies, parry shots (gang rape), statutory rape, school violence, retaliation for being informers (800 tips). They also spoke about 'ranking'- a way in which young people gain status amongst their peers and in the communities and form hierarchies. Young men are ranked by how 'gangsta' they are (drug lords/gang leaders), having the most money, having killed someone, having 'best-girls'. Girls are ranked by the level of gangster boyfriend they have, if they are leaders of a gang, the amount of 'bling'(jewellery) they have. The 'ranking' is violent and the young people acknowledge this. 'Ranking' starts as early as Standard Four (ages 9-10 years).

Prevention Strategies:

The following strategies were articulated in the Feature Address by Professor Wendy Cukier and civil society organizations across the region provided examples of such programmes and the successes they have achieved.

a) International Policies

To be effective, Gun Control must be attacked on an international scale since the unregulated countries impact the more regulated ones through the movement of guns. International Human Rights laws are violated by not regulating gun control including the failure to protect women from a pattern of domestic violence.

A major roadblock in combating the illegal trade in guns is that Guns start off legal and then are diverted to the illegal market. The drug trade, unlike the gun trade to which it is linked, is illegal from production to consumption. And while drugs are consumed and gone, guns however, stay in circulation. In the end, the targets of law enforcement are the low people on the totem

pole while the people who benefit from the drug and gun trade are multi-millionaires.

International and hemispheric agencies like the UN and Project Ploughshares have been holding discussions to mobilize and establish national standards but while work has been done to enact legislation to support gun control, the necessary support for these laws is not there. There needs to be the infrastructure, systems and resources to enforce laws, the will to prosecute and convict perpetrators and the support to protect women and children in domestic violence situations. However, investing in primary prevention is where the most significant rewards reside. Investing in children, social services and education is expensive, but the costs of gun violence. Violence in some communities completely disrupts the provision of services such as electricity, water and sanitation and causes hardships for families.

b) Mainstreaming gender into the discussion on Gun Violence helps create a wider vision of possible solutions.

Often those involved in discussions on gun violence are people who are in the gun industry. They tend to focus on technical aspects of the issue as a way to marginalize people who do not love guns and know everything about guns. It is the same as holding discussions on drug abuse policy and only consulting users. The participation of women in these discussions is important because it brings a different perspective to gun violence. Mainstreaming gender into the discussion produces more solutions such as equipping women's shelters to do risk assessments for gun violence or addressing key influences such as the socialization of boys. It should be noted however that simply having a woman present in these discussions does not mean they automatically have a gender perspective.

In Haiti women's organizations are organizing and participating in various mobilization and advocacy campaigns with the Government, Parliament and the general public for better control of weapons in Haiti, including bringing national legislation on the use of firearms.

The Women's Conversations Project has been highlighted as one intervention for implementation throughout the Coalition Member States. The Conversations provided a forum for the evaluation and exploration of

prevailing assumptions about armed violence in society; to allow women to speak about their own life stories and in so doing uncover their own feelings and awareness of the ways in which violence affects their lives; offered an opportunity to challenge a prevailing ethos of 'blaming women' for being victims of violence or neglectful child-rearing and helped women locate themselves as change agents in combating violence in their communities.

c) Context must dictate one's approach to Gun Violence

In sharing the experiences and strategies used by other countries to end gun violence care must be taken not to be prescriptive. While amnesties for bringing in illegal guns have worked in some countries, it is important to understand the contexts in which gun violence occurs. For example, it is much more difficult to re-integrate a gang member than a child soldier. When warfare is over, to the child soldier, the conflict is over, the job is done. In the case of the gang member, they need to be re-integrated into a new community.

d) Relationship-building and a belief in the "possibility of change".

The importance of believing in the possibility of change was highlighted. Small populations have the potential to change much more quickly than larger and more diffused populations. Relationship building is important to the success of interventions and also noted that there is no substitute for building community relationships with the police and that partnership, and community-based programs, are the interventions that in her experience have proven to be most successful.

In Guyana, while the state's response to the escalating violence has been to increase policing and equip police with more guns and bulletproof vests, civil society has been engaged in peace-building efforts. There have been twenty-five peace-building initiatives including pledges and walks, ten community projects for youth and national conversations on race and ethnicity. While 95% of perpetrators of violence are men, 75% of participants in peace-building activities are women.

Combating armed violence in Guyana requires an alignment of the state policy for security and the community peace-building process, so that civil society can engage in policy making.

e) Efforts aimed at creating change

In Jamaica, several organizations have been working to change attitudes with regard to gender-based violence and also encourage peace-building efforts to stem the rate of violence in communities.

Women's Media Watch (WMW) in collaboration with the Bureau of Women's Affairs (BWA) has spearheaded a project aimed at reducing gender-based violence in Jamaica. Over the past twelve months, WMW has trained media workers, teachers, counsellors, trainers and community leaders on the relevant national policies, laws, and UN conventions which speak to violence against women, in an effort to reduce the tolerance for and acceptance of violence against women within communities. They have also implemented a public education and awareness-raising campaign on gender and violence using the media, public fora, magazines, and the internet to disseminate the message.

Peace Management Initiative (PMI) works closely with several volatile inner-city communities to provide mediation, conflict resolution and life skills training and income-generating opportunities. They have also been training women to become peace builders. The Kingston and St. Andrew Action Forum (KSAAF) launched the "Women For Peace" campaign in May of 2008 in which women were encouraged to become agents of change. The initiative urges women not to support or shield their men who are involved in criminal activity because in the end they are the ones who will be most affected.

Under the Jamaica Violence Prevention, Peace and Sustainable Development (JVPDPD) Programme, the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) has established pilot community peace and justice centres as one-stop centres for citizens to access legal advice and mediation and to support the work of the police and courts in tackling crime and violence. The centres play an important role in addressing gender issues at community level, including working with young men to address aggressive masculinity and providing access to services.

f) Interventions for Youth and peace-building initiatives

Women's groups in Belize have been urging the government to invest in programs for the young people so that they can find employment and not

resort to criminal activities to try and support their families. In response the government of Belize has revitalized the Conscious Youth Development Program (CYDP) which works closely with the Police Department to engage young men who are at risk in opportunities for "alternative livelihoods".

Community organizations and groups have also been formed to fight against crime and to implement preventative measures. One such group is the Mothers Organized for Peace (MOP) which was established by mothers whose sons were victims of fatal gun violence. The group engages in anti-crime vigils, memorial services and marches against violence while giving each other support.

In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the Committee for the Development of Women (CDW) through its Purple Ribbon Campaign has launched a programme targeting young males - "*Young Men, Partners in Nation Building*". There is an ongoing campaign against gun violence.

Parliamentarians in their Constituencies encourage programmes to make peace among groups. One such group is the *Urban League*, based in one of the town's slum-squatter housing areas. The Parliamentary Representative is supporting the Urban League with the starting up of a drumming and pan side, a community choir, and an HIV/AIDS programme in collaboration with the National AIDS Secretariat. This is in addition to already successful sporting and environmental programmes. The Social Investment Fund has also contributed to the construction of a Playing Field.

An initiative called "*Pan Against Crime*" was launched in 2008. The idea is to attract young people to the steel pan, and allow them the opportunity to use their musical talents and so steer away from a life of crime. The "*Pan Against Crime*" initiative is now one year old. It is part of an overall strategy which includes connecting with the community through culture, music and sports, in conjunction with the recruitment and training of law enforcement, and education.

In 2009, the initiative was expanded to "*Mothers Against Crime*", involving mothers in playing the musical instrument and through their music bringing attention to loss of children and spouses.

Conclusion:

The problems of guns and violence in our respective communities and countries have not occurred in isolation and did not happen overnight. As such solutions should not be one-dimensional and requires strong will perseverance and determination they are to be successful and sustainable.

It is also very critical that civil society organizations continue to mobilize and align themselves in ways that will truly make a difference.

THANK YOU.