

Chair's Summary

Ending armed violence for peace and development in Latin America

Geneva Declaration 2014 Regional Review Conference

Antigua, Guatemala, 30 April 2014.- The Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development Regional Review Conference brought together representatives from 22 countries in Antigua, Guatemala, from 28 to 30 April. The Conference gave rise to a series of debates on the commitment of the States that adhered to the Geneva Declaration on the reduction of the global burden of armed violence, both in conflict situations and in contexts of insecurity.

The two paramount objectives were to analyse the successes achieved in reduction of violence, and to foster the exchange of information and lessons learned between the participating States, specialists, academics, and representatives of civil society.

The Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development acknowledges that armed violence constitutes not only a cause but also a consequence of the problems of development, and that in different situations it obstructs to a large extent the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (Outcome Document, 2nd Ministerial Review Conference on the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, 2011).

The States adhering to the Geneva Declaration recognise that it is necessary to contend with the structural roots of violence and insecurity. Moreover, it is imperative to fight against inequality, youth unemployment and the lack of opportunities, with a view to promoting a sustainable development and, consequently, achieving a greater level of co-existence, without forgetting the local and cultural particularities of each territory and population.

The Conference was structured in plenary sessions which tackled the challenges of armed violence in Latin America, the main lessons learned, and the definition of future lines of action for the prevention, combating and control of armed violence. Additionally, the representatives of the countries concerned took part in thematic panels which addressed the following topics: the problems of the victims and the

survivors of armed violence; youths in their dual capacity of victims and aggressors; the relationship between violence against women and armed violence; the politics of prevention founded on a community focus; the role of the private sector in the prevention and reduction of armed violence; and the relationship between development and armed violence within the framework of the post-2015 development agenda.

Amongst the many ideas and messages that emerged from these debates, we single out the following:

Information management:

The Conference highlighted the particular importance of harvesting data on security and violence in order to support the formulation of public policies and programmes. With this in mind, participants stressed the need for accessible, appropriate, regular, sound, and reliable information. The validity and credibility of such information depends on the participation of appropriate actors, and it is likely to generate some tension between the desire for up-to-date information and the need for a reliable validation process.

The information needs to be subjected to a review process that avoids and corrects any potential errors and, thereby, promotes a high level of public confidence in the relevant data and institutions. In the same way, in order for such information to be useful in the process of political decision-making, the data should be disaggregated, to the greatest extent possible, by gender and age, whilst taking into account geographical factors.

Gender:

The main conclusion arrived at by the participants in the course of the discussions was that there have indeed been certain achievements in eradicating violence against women, not only in the sphere of information management, but also in terms of criminal justice, thanks to the creation of special units (such as in the case of Guatemala, where such units are helping to investigate cases so as to put an end to aggressors' impunity).

The participants also concluded that there is a clear gender dimension in terms of possession of weapons, with the majority in the hands of men. That is why it is necessary to promote the participation of women as agents of change in the designing of security policies, as has been stipulated in the 2012 Review Conference of the United Nations Programme of Action on the control of small arms and light weapons in 2012.

Victims and survivors of violence:

The report *The Global Burden of Armed Violence* estimates that 526,000 people die each year as a direct physical result of violence throughout the world. This represents 1,500 deaths per day, with between 605 and 865 being the product of an incident of armed violence. For each mortal victim, it is estimated that there are another three people injured by arms. Nevertheless, these cases are not always included adequately in the statistics, in spite of their consequences on the system of health, welfare and development.

Regarding survivors of armed violence, it is estimated that, generally, a victim needs several years to resume a normal life. During that time, he or she has to learn how to recover from their injuries and trauma, and acquire the materials

and equipment necessary to mobilise themselves and achieve physical independence. Survivors need a certain level of support in order to re-integrate into society, and so it is vital to incorporate the rights of victims and survivors into the political agenda.

Firearms control:

The Plenary expressed its delight at the recent approval of the Arms Trade Treaty, the first legally binding global instrument for the regulation of international arms transfers.

Several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean are succeeding in reducing their homicide rates. The main features of successful strategies have been: reform of the legal frameworks and implementation of strategies of investigation and criminal proceedings (these include special methods of investigation, electronic surveillance, criminal analysis, improved use of forensic sciences). The participants recognise the need to better understand the patterns of illegal arms trafficking and use.

A fundamental aspect is the control of arsenals of arms and ammunition. It is vital that both state-owned and private arsenals are guaranteed to be physically safe and efficiently managed.

These practices need to go hand-in-hand with other measures, such as the destruction of any surpluses and improvement in relevant legislation. With this in mind, the participants underlined the need to encourage a full understanding of these processes in order to help guarantee their efficient implementation.

Youth:

Latin America and the Caribbean form an eminently young region, and so it is necessary to pay special attention to this part of the population in order to reduce violence.

Although juveniles are the primary victims of violence, discrimination, exclusion, and social stigmatization, we cannot deny that this group also represents the largest number of aggressors. Nevertheless, it is important to perceive juveniles as a source of enormous potential, offering creativity and engagement. Youth should not just be considered as the recipient of a handful of projects, and as subjects of their rights juveniles should assume a central position in the development of policies dealing with armed violence reduction and prevention.

The need for alliances in order to reduce armed violence:

The reduction and prevention of armed violence calls for long-term commitments and a profound local ownership of the response processes, with the aim of developing an inclusive approach involving the many actors: governments, security and judicial agencies, human rights organisations, the private sector, and civil society. These actors need to coordinate their operational work and participate in the elaboration of public policies towards the reduction and prevention of violence. All of this will contribute to the strengthening of institutional capacities and will guarantee a holistic vision. Finally, public policies and programmes have to be accompanied by adequate resources and capacities for their implementation.

Reduction and prevention of armed violence, as a theme of development:

The response to insecurity needs to address the structural roots of violence and insecurity. With a view to promoting sustainable development and, consequently, improving the level of co-existence, it is vital to fight against inequality, youth unemployment, and lack of opportunity. In short, insecurity has to be a priority for development policies and strategies.

The conference enabled a lively debate on the need for inclusion of armed violence reduction and the promotion of peace within the framework of development strategies, not only at national level, but also at regional and multilateral levels. Although improvements in citizens' security are a priority for countries in the region, the participants' opinions diverged in relation to the inclusion of peace and reduction in armed violence in multilateral development processes.

The ideas of the countries that adhered to the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development will enrich the discussions in the context of the United Nations General Assembly on the post-2015 Development Agenda.

Some of the lessons learned are:

- To design public citizen security policies based on comprehensive strategies which envision the prevention of violence, its penalisation, and which promote peaceful co-existence and help for the victims and survivors of armed violence.
- To increase the real opportunities of human development for the youth, and to include this topic in the policies for prevention of armed violence. To reinforce the values of peaceful co-existence, including the participation, tolerance, and to prevent the stigmatization of vulnerable populations.
- To strengthen the systems of information-analysis and management for the design of public policies to prevent armed violence, to standardise the citizen security indicators for the measuring and control of violence at regional level, and to guarantee access to transparently supplied information.
- To link citizen security policies to strategies for reducing impunity, by means of strengthening the institutions of justice and security, with the aim of generating greater confidence in citizens and institutions; and to promote a virtuous circle between development, confidence and security.
- To strengthen national co-ordination and regional co-operation in order to reduce the impact of firearms, identify gaps in knowledge, and determine the dynamics of arms trafficking, with the aim of devising better regulations.
- To promote models of local management of citizen security which promote civil society's active participation, especially of local communities in the forging, control, and implementation of public policies.

- To prevent any gender violence in a domestic setting and in the public sphere, by defeating the cultural pattern of armed violence as a symbol of masculinity, and investing in education as a tool for overcoming such a pattern.
- To invest in the management of knowledge, in the exchange of experiences, and in South-South co-operation, as mechanisms for analysing and nurturing public safety plans which promote a greater understanding of the overall challenges, solutions, and responses.

The participants would like to express their thanks to Guatemala, the host country of this Regional Review Conference for the Americas, the first such conference, for its hospitality and welcome. Also, they congratulate the country for its efforts in preventing violence and its improvements in safety and security conditions.

The Chair would like to wish success to all the organisers and attendees of the next regional discussions which will be held in the next few months in Switzerland, the Philippines, Morocco, and Kenya.

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