

Armed Violence & Development: It's Time for a New Narrative about Security

By Luigi de Martino, Coordinator of the Secretariat of the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development

Sustainable development is impossible in the absence of peace and security, and that these elements need to be addressed in the framework that will follow on from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), said Yves Rossier, State Secretary of Switzerland's Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, at the opening session of the Regional Review Conference on the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development.

The Conference, held in Geneva on 8 and 9 July, brought together representatives from across Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia to discuss how to effect measurable reductions in armed violence, and improved development, both in the region and globally.

While these regions enjoy relatively low rates of armed violence generally, and have seen significant measurable reductions since 2004, they do still face a number of challenges. These include:

- In this region, Southern Europe has the highest share of firearm homicides, with 40% of homicides committed using firearms. In Eastern Europe, the sub-region with the lowest share, 9.2% of homicides involve firearms.
- The regions together have more than their share of lethal violence against women: while they are home to 16 % of the world population, and around 14% of the world's female population, their overall rate of lethal violence is less than 10%, yet they account for 16% of female victims. In Europe, women account for 32% of victims of lethal violence, nearly double the global average of 16%. (In Central Asia 24% of victims are women, and 7% in the Caucasus).

Launched in 2006 by Switzerland and the UNDP, the Geneva Declaration is a diplomatic initiative that considers armed violence as a major obstacle to development, and commits signatory states to contribute to a measurable reduction of armed violence. Initially adopted by 42 states at its launch, the Declaration is now endorsed by 112 countries.

Five Regional Review Conferences are being held this year to give a forum for states and civil society to consider current concerns for development, armed violence, security, and related issues. These issues are especially pertinent as we draw to close to the end of the MDG cycle, and the international community considers the development landscape for the post 2015 phase.

The first of these conferences, for the Americas, was held in Guatemala in April. The Regional Review Conference in Geneva, for Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, was the second. And three more will be held later this year: in the Philippines, for Asia and the Pacific; in Morocco, covering the Middle East, North Africa, and Sahel; and in Nairobi, covering Sub-Saharan Africa.

Speaking at the opening session of the Geneva conference, UN Women Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir emphasized the need for gender issues to be mainstreamed in

the security and development agenda, stressing that the erosion of women's rights was a common thread in the rise of violent extremist movements.

Women and children suffer especially in conflict and post-conflict environments, she said, noting that they make up a disproportionately large number of displaced people as a result of conflicts.

Michael Møller, Acting Director General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, called for a change in the narrative about security, specifically to include a greater focus on reducing illicit small arms flows, and increasing respect for human rights. The Geneva Declaration, he noted, was a good model of an innovative policy instrument that promoted a more inclusive approach to security and development issues.

The discussions at these Regional Review Conferences highlighted the need for timely, reliable, informative, impartial, and disaggregated data to be used for global and national policies to reduce armed violence. Armed violence is a universal issue and member states need to share the burden of addressing its causes and consequences, and the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development serves to encourage and coordinate their efforts.

- For more information visit www.genevadeclaration.org/2014RRC