

Statement by Civil Society Organizations at the 2d Ministerial Review Conference of the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development

On the occasion of the Presentation of the final Outcome Document

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Presenter: Melina Risso, Director, Instituto Sou da Paz, Brazil

(Check against Delivery)

Excellencies, honourable ministers, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues,

In the five years, since 42 countries gathered to sign the Geneva Declaration, there has been some progress in achieving its goals. Yet at the end of these five years, the world for many remains a dark and dangerous place.

Nearly three million people have died from armed violence and millions more have been injured or traumatised in mind or in body. Ninety per cent of these destructive crimes have occurred not on some distant battlefield but in our homes and on our streets.....literally in our own backyards.

Armed violence impoverishes every life it touches. The absence of development and armed violence are inextricably linked. The 2011 World Development Report documents that 1.5 billion people live in countries plagued by repeated violence. Not one of these countries has achieved a single Millennium Development Goal.

Unless we identify appropriate remedies, armed violence will go on proliferating and destroying the fabric of society and the futures of many millions of people.

We have reached an important crossroads today in our journey together. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) represented here today affirm and endorse the commitments made in the Outcome Document of this meeting and we renew our support for the Geneva Declaration and the Oslo Commitments.

And in doing so it is useful to recall what we have achieved together.

In the last five years of activity there have been literally hundreds of interventions by states and CSOs from the arms control, human rights, peacebuilding and development sectors promoting armed violence reduction locally, nationally and internationally.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) recent mapping study identifies in six countries alone over 570 armed violence reduction programmes, many led by Civil Society Organisations.

There has been important engagement in arenas of global governance: a UN General Assembly resolution, UN Secretary General reports and mention of the Geneva Declaration and armed violence reduction in a range of international declarations.

We especially applaud the work of the Geneva Declaration's Secretariat and its partners, the United Nations Development Programme and the Quaker United Nations Office in Geneva in their tireless efforts to share knowledge, to build consensus and promote effective programmes.

We welcome your commitment here today to the terms of our Outcome Document... "to integrate armed violence reduction and prevention priorities into national and sub-national development and security plans and programmes."

But we remind you that your commitment to these laudable objectives will be worthless unless it is translated into practical action.

As the actors on the ground we are only too aware of the magnitude of the challenges facing us. We believe that this is a moment of truth where we must create an engine to drive us on towards our destination of a world where armed violence is universally abhorred as well as outlawed.

As partners in promoting such a world where greater numbers of our fellow human beings are freed to live fuller lives and realise their potential, we as Civil Society Organisations must also re-commit ourselves.

To this end, we propose the establishment of a global alliance on armed violence reduction that will work with civil society organisations, institutions and communities active in your states. Our work towards that end will begin in discussions here.

With the support of our allies, partners and stakeholders, we will promote innovative and evidence-based strategies to create effective national action plans and programmes that reduce armed violence.

We will exchange good practice, build capacity and strengthen advocacy around the world to reduce armed violence.

Why is such an alliance necessary?

Because, simply put, there is no universal solution to armed violence, occurring as it does in a multiplicity of contexts. By building on an array of evidence-based outcomes exemplified by the OECD report, we can demonstrate how armed violence can be treated in a variety of circumstances and countries.

It is this plurality of approaches that has the potential to create a longer term solution where individual governments, civil society organisations, communities and citizens can draw down such a repertoire of resource and apply what most clearly meets their needs.

But if there are no champions, no resources and no resolve, then many citizens and their governments will remain disempowered, as much by disillusion, as the failure of one approach fails to generate a dialogue to generate another.

In the last turbulent decade, many states have promoted what was described as a “whole of government approach” to address insecurity where official development strategies were also designated a role in stabilising communities.

What we believe is required is a “whole of society approach” where the public and the private sector, the legislator and the community, the powerful and the disempowered share the burden and share the responsibility of challenging armed violence.

You have an important role to play in working with us to transform our shared purpose into a living reality rather than a lament for the dead.

We applaud the leadership that states such as Switzerland and Norway have shown in forcing the world to gaze unflinchingly at the problem of armed violence and to look at ourselves and our ultimate responsibility for its existence and its proliferation.

Our roles are complementary. CSOs can do things that states cannot do, just as States can do things that CSOs cannot. We are the two faces of the same coin that we call social capital: the rule of law and the right to participate.

But you have a special facilitating role to play in making sure that the means of participation are available to all. It is the breadth and depth of that participation that will define whether real change happens.

Armed violence reduction needs champions. It needs resources. It will require resolve, tenacity and patience. Armed violence will not disappear overnight.

The financial and logistical support of your government is critical to the success of this enterprise and indeed to the survival of millions of people at risk if armed violence is not systematically addressed.

This journey like many great undertakings will begin with a single step. Let us take that step together, now.

Thank you.