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 Closing Remarks and Conclusion of the Conference

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Civil society’s call for action

Excellencies, honourable ministers, ladies and gentlemen.

First, let me thank the organizers of this Conference for ensuring that civil society voices have been duly represented in this forum.

During the last two days we have come closer to understanding the inextricable, two-way link between armed violence and development. Put simply: development builds, armed violence destroys, massively and systematically. In seconds, a bomb or a bullet can destroy what takes years to rebuild, be it buildings, trust or humans. We must act now to make sure that the commitments made in the outcome document are translated into concrete actions on the ground.

In closing this conference, civil society organizations – sharing your intent of reducing levels of armed violence globally -- would like to call governments to mobilize all available political and financial capital for the following four actions:

1. Implement a “whole of society approach” to tackle the problem of armed violence;

2. Fully implement existing armed violence reduction agreements – and commit to respect the humanitarian imperative when creating new ones;

3. Strengthen evidence on the problem of armed violence; and

4. Recognize and ensure the rights of victims of armed violence

These goals reflect the spirit of the pledges you have made in the Outcome Document for this Conference.
First, in our statement yesterday, we talked about the “whole of society approach”. Let me take a moment to explain what we mean.

The whole of society approach is needed both in terms of who is involved in the work on armed violence reduction, as well as the policies and programs that are needed in order to be effective in our endeavors. Integrated programs need to be built and run in a transparent manner, and must incorporate open and comprehensive assessment mechanisms to ensure accountability.

Recognizing the linkages between armed violence and development, governments should include armed violence reduction and prevention as a clear and central objective in national development and public security planning, should dedicate specific resources to support programming, and should develop measurable indicators to monitor progress.

Here are some examples of good practices among civil society organisations:

- Strengthen dialogue between communities and armed forces;
- Promote the use of civilian to civilian protection;
- Strengthen local capacity for mediation and restorative justice;
- Strengthen cross-border armed violence prevention and reduction by providing effective and comprehensive training to police and border military patrols and by addressing the needs of border communities;
- Provide safe spaces for civilians to undertake conflict resolution, peacemaking and peacebuilding.

A whole of society approach also means expanding partnership between civil society, development community, local and national government, individuals. As we have heard in many of the statements presented here, the private sector must also be engaged in efforts at armed violence reduction and prevention. We must also institutionalize the important contribution of women and women’s groups and assure adequate participation.

Without effective partnership between all of us, we will be here again in three years, before the MDGS, lamenting the missed opportunities. It is high time for action.

Second, implement existing agreements – and create strong new ones

Countries must not only adhere and fully implement existing agreements that tackle aspects of armed violence, but constantly strive to ameliorate their practical results. This goes for international agreements addressing the vectors of violence, such as the UN Program of Action on SALW, the International Tracing Instrument, the Firearms Protocol, regional and sub-regional agreements, but also national gun control legislation and procedures. Agreements banning inhumane weapons such as landmines and cluster munitions should likewise become universal, wholly implemented and not undermined by weak instruments in other fora.
It is not enough to implement existing agreements, however, as some signatory countries either lack, or could significantly improve, their own comprehensive national laws and procedures. It is essential to strengthen capabilities, legal and operational, to prevent, reduce and punish the unlawful and irresponsible use of the ‘tools’ of armed violence.

Internationally, states must do their utmost to create new instruments that respect the humanitarian imperative of fighting armed violence in all possible ways. When negotiating these agreements, states must ensure these enshrine their full potential to reduce and prevent armed violence. Irresponsible arms transfers and excessive military spending fuel violence and poverty, and divert resources from development. As the ICRC and several countries have stressed, we need to control much better the trade in SALW, ammunition, and other conventional weapons.

Therefore, all states must commit to deliver a robust Arms Trade Treaty in the July 2012 negotiations, including specific criteria that would prevent arms from being transferred to contexts of serious abuses of human rights or international humanitarian law, systemic armed violence or would undermine development.

Third, strengthen evidence on the problem of armed violence.

In order to better understand this daily tragedy and address it effectively, governments must significantly strengthen their collection and analysis of data on armed violence deaths and injuries, including complete data on victims, perpetrators and the weapons used.

It is essential to devise inclusive approaches to measure and monitor armed violence, including all relevant stakeholders at national and local level in strategies and planning of armed violence reduction and prevention based on comprehensive data provided by these stakeholders. Liberia’s Armed Violence Observatory is a great example of how to undertake such an endeavor.

States must ensure regular and efficient monitoring of rates of armed violence nationally, with all disaggregated data and methodologies being made public in a timely and transparent manner – so the public, press and civil society can monitor and support government performance.

These knowledge-based efforts are especially urgent and relevant for devising national and global action plans against armed violence, as initial indications suggest that many countries are sorely missing these essential mechanisms. For example, 12 organizations from Latin America working for the past year on documenting the approach that states in the region use to address armed violence have found that despite progress in measurement, there is little use of evidence in public policies and an overall lack of transparency and access to information. These and other analytical efforts prove that, to tame armed violence, we must better understand the beast.
Fourth, recognize and ensure the rights of victims of armed violence.

Recognizing the rights of victims is an essential aspect of addressing armed violence. Survivors and affected communities must be involved in armed violence reduction and prevention programs. In addition to prevention, we must identify victims’ needs, strengthen policies and programs to provide immediate medical care, rehabilitation, access to justice, and economic and social inclusion.

In closing, we can and must act together to improve the opportunities of all human beings to build better lives. We are ready to rise to the challenge presented by the four aforementioned actions. We go away more united than we came in the determination to act on the aims of the Geneva Declaration. We call on all governments to do the same.

Finally, we wish to express our sincere thanks to the government of Switzerland, UNDP and the Geneva Declaration Secretariat for all you have done to encourage and facilitate our being with you all for these days and for bringing us all together for this important meeting.

Thank you.