

For debate in the Standing Committee — see Rule 15 of the Rules of Procedure

Doc. 11080

16 October 2006

The need for greater transparency in the arms trade

Opinion¹

Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men

Rapporteur: Mrs Westerlund Panke, Sweden, Socialist Group

I. Conclusions of the Committee

The Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men fully supports the draft resolution presented. It wishes, however, to present one amendment to ensure that the gender impact of the problem is taken into account.

II. Proposed amendment to the draft resolution

Add at the end of paragraph 9.2.1. the following words: “which also takes into account the gender impact of the arms trade”.

III. Explanatory memorandum by Mrs Westerlund Panke, Rapporteur

1. It may come as a surprise to many members of the Assembly that there is a gender aspect to the arms trade. But, in fact, there is, especially as far as small arms and light weapons (SALW) are concerned. Under the slogan “the multi-billion dollar trade that puts women in the firing line”, three prominent NGOs (Amnesty International, Oxfam and the International Action Network on Small Arms) recently published a report on this gender impact of the arms trade².

2. According to this report, there are estimated to be almost 650 million small arms in the world today, mostly in the hands of men, and nearly 60% of them in the hands of private individuals. Given that women are almost never the buyers, owners or users of small arms, they suffer disproportionately from armed violence, most of it gendered – such as domestic violence, and rape. Women and children are also the most vulnerable in armed conflicts, associated with the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons, as the IPU has recently pointed out³.

3. The figures speak for themselves: in the USA, a gun in the home increases the risk that someone in the household will be murdered by 41%, but increases the risk for women by 272%; in France, one in

¹ See Assembly Doc. 11079 tabled by the Political Affairs Committee.

² “The impact of guns on women’s lives”, joint report by Amnesty International, Oxfam and the International Action Network on Small Arms, published 7 March 2005, available on the website of Amnesty International (<http://web.amnesty.org>).

³ IPU resolution on the role of parliaments in strengthening control of trafficking in small arms and light weapons and their ammunition, adopted by consensus by the 114th Assembly in Nairobi on 12 May 2006.

three women killed by their husbands is shot; in South Africa, a woman is shot dead by a current or former partner every 18 hours; family killings are one category of homicides where women outnumber men as victims, with partners or male relatives the most likely murderers⁴.

4. It is thus important that the question of who is going to be the likely victim of a weapon is taken into account when countries authorise cross-border arms transfers. However, how a country gives out gun licences internally is also important.

5. The small arms policies most likely to reduce the risk to women in their everyday lives are those which focus on how private individuals acquire guns and how they store them. For example, countries can introduce restrictions on gun licences to avoid them being given out to people who have had a domestic violence protection order issued against them (many perpetrators of domestic violence escape conviction on a criminal offence, so it is important not to bar only convicted criminals). Another possibility is to require the applicant's current or former spouse to be notified before a licence is granted or renewed (this is the case in Canada, for example).

6. A proper control of cross-border arms transfers is also important – especially in regions with conflicts or recovering from conflicts. The UN Programme of Action on Small Arms, agreed in July 2001, requires participating states to “assess applications for export authorisations according to strict national regulations and procedures that cover all small arms and light weapons and are consistent with the existing responsibilities of States under relevant international law”. It can be argued that one of these existing responsibilities is to ensure that small arms do not fall into the “wrong hands” – this includes not just the hands of terrorists, criminal gangs and trigger-happy policemen in dictatorships, but also violent husbands and demobilised soldiers or disbanded militias who are likely to turn their guns on women.

7. It would thus be important for the proposed Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) to take the gender aspect of the arms trade into account. This could be achieved, for example, by adding a reference to the (practically universally ratified) Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) into Article 3 of the proposed ATT, according to which an arms transfer must not proceed if a state knows or ought to know that the arms will be used for serious violations of human rights enshrined in non-derogable provisions of key international conventions – in this case the right of every woman to live a life without violence or the fear of it. Another possibility would be adding a reference to men's violence against women to Article 4 of the proposed ATT, which asks governments to take into account the possible effect of the transfer or arms, such as the likelihood that they could be used for or facilitate the commission of violent crimes.

8. I thus wholeheartedly support the draft resolution tabled by my Swedish colleague Mrs Ohlsson, and hope that she – and the Political Affairs Committee – will agree to the amendment I am proposing to ensure that the gender impact of the arms trade is not overlooked.

* * *

Reporting committee: Political Affairs Committee

Committee seized for opinion: Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men

Reference to Committee: Doc 10540, reference N°3090 of 6 June 2005

Opinion unanimously adopted by the Committee on 5 October 2006

Secretariat of the Committee: Ms Kleinsorge, Ms Affholder, Ms Devaux, Mr Diallo

⁴ Press release by Amnesty International: News Service No. 51, 7 March 2005.