What Next? Thoughts for Global Civil Society Working on Arms Control and Armed Violence Reduction

Introduction

This is a substantial document and the culmination of widespread consultation and deliberation among interested parties prior to publication. It represents a valued source for non-governmental and civil society formations active in attempts to curb gun violence and promote small arms control. Instituto Sou da Paz (ISP) has sought feedback and PSAAG is happy to provide it.

PSAAG shares with ISP the view that such feedback is necessary to promote continuing debate as to how civil society formations can best foster reductions in gun violence. Concerned agencies may take from 'What Next?' those findings and conclusions that resonate most strongly within the regions and national settings of greatest familiarity to them. However the study offers observations of general applicability that are too important to ignore. These include the necessity to constantly retain a clear delineation of aims and objectives. Hence the study’s claim that ‘what we want to achieve should define how we achieve it, not vice versa’. As well, the advantages of independence from, and resilience to donor, intergovernmental, or national institutional pressures, agendas, or processes is stressed. That is required to maintain a focus where it belongs: armed violence reduction as the fundamental starting point. Few will dispute the study’s recurring claims about the need for a stronger evidential base from which to conduct advocacy programmes.

This response summarises material provided under the main headings provided by ‘What Next?’ Not all are considered, exclusions being a section on smart guns and another on dealing with what is termed the Unique States of America. Readers wanting full details about these or other cited sources are referred to the original document. A final section reflects upon relevant PSAAG experience and makes some prescriptive contributions for a necessary international conversation.

Key Headings from 'What Next?'

Some Introductory Premises

# 1 – No Silver Bullet
Regarding the tools of violence, the study sees the interrelationships between arms, violence and insecurity as two-way. They are complex and dynamic, and the appropriate framework needs to regard small arms availability and their flows as important, relatively independent factors associated with violence, conflict and insecurity. While universal patterns do not exist, certain trends, quantified numbers and levels of magnitude require taking into account.

# 2 – It’s the Guns
The focus is on small arms which, it is noted, kill and injure more on a daily basis worldwide than any other type of technology developed to inflict harm on humanity.
Weapons in the hands of groups in conflict are a small component of global arms ownership. Even in relatively stable non-conflict countries, annual gun death and injury rates can approach those exacted by armed conflicts. The psychological impact of this harm is massive; so, too, is its potential for social intimidation within communities and domestic environments most familiar to women and children. An inclusion of the toll exacted by firearm suicides and unintentional shootings further underlines the disproportionate role played by firearms in the epidemic of gun violence.

# 3 – War and Peace
A further reason for immediate attention to small arms is the blurred distinction that now exists between ‘war’ and ‘peace’ within ubiquitous internal conflicts. A 2011 Global Burden of Armed Violence study noted that only 10 per cent of armed violence deaths worldwide occur in a military conflict or terrorist attack. That percentage may have increased, but there is no denying that the vast majority of those who now die, are injured, or otherwise suffer from armed violence do so in countries ‘at peace’. These conditions highlight the need to universalise rules debarring the indiscriminate effects of weapons causing superfluous injury and unnecessary suffering. Required is the sharper crystallisation of an international community of ‘humanitarian disarmament’, covering a range of weapons and technologies inflicting civilian harm and grave risk to populations.

# 4 – Misuse is the heart of the matter
Cited is Article 36 of Additional Protocol 1 (1977) to the Geneva Conventions (1949) namely: ‘a weapon that can be used with precision can also be abusively used against the civilian population. In this case it is not the weapon which is prohibited, but the method or way in which it is used’. However unlike virtually all other human security initiatives, small arms control advocacy has to operate against an organised gun lobby that has the objective of limiting any efforts to control the availability of firearms.

# 5 – International attention, national diversion
The assumption that international trade and trafficking is the most important piece of the puzzle is simply wrong. Citing Greene and Marsh (2011), most fragile state locations witness weak domestic regulation, theft, loss, or corrupt sale which, in totality, constitute bigger problems than small arms trafficked across borders. Many weapon flows remain restricted to localised regional settings. A focus on export and import controls, brokering, and promotion of border controls is necessary but inadequate. Substantial amounts of weapons enter the black market after their export. These realities are known but inadequately reflected in civil society advocacy on small arms controls. That reflects a serious knowledge deficiency which requires remedy for effective, better balanced advocacy. A UN mantra that illicit transfer warrants the highest priority requires offsetting through demands to end the destabilising domestic accumulation and misuse of firearms.

Get Back to the Basics

A problem currently exists with the SALW (small arms and light weapons) nomenclature. It is conceptually burdensome; some light weapons may have more in common with larger conventional weaponry than small arms. Small arms remain the
primary instruments of carnage, something that initially catalysed civil society to lobby for the Programme of Action (POA), the Firearms Protocol and the Arms Trade Treaty. The World Health Organisation’s Campaign for Violence Prevention accords priority to implementation of evidence-based measures to reduce the risks of firearm-related deaths and injuries.

What, who, why … and how?

What firearms should be legal, who may own them, and why could they be lawfully possessed? Flowing from that effective laws and policies need to pivot around: (i) relevant prohibitions or restrictions of certain uses of weapons; (ii) prohibitions or restrictions on particular users of weapons; (iii) prohibitions or restrictions on certain types of guns. Whether by accident or design a large number of countries maintain lax gun control laws. They lack the basics of properly restrictive gun control law, and the operational and regulatory tools needed to administer them. While often controversial, the actual terms of civilian small arms possession should comprise a key areas of focus for global civil society. In instances this may mean more focus on handguns, less on rifles and other specific firearms used for hunting. Some firearms (e.g. sub-machine guns, assault rifles) should be designated for purely military custody. Although immediately difficult to achieve, it should be possible for advocacy campaigns at national and regional levels to insist upon global bans on civilian access to military weapons. Impunity among armed forces and the police, criminal gang formation, and sexual violence under conditions of heightened insecurity all reinforce the need for much stronger advocacy aimed at halting the flow of semi-automatic and automatic firearms.

There are instances (Brazil) where the distinction between owning and carrying a weapon has been demarcated to some effect. The challenges of determining minimum standards of ownership and use are substantial but have to be confronted. Regarding ownership, consensus over the basic prescriptive criteria required is feasible: age limitations, possible criminal background, technical skill, mental health, risk factors of alcohol and drug abuse, and proven records of domestic violence all warranting due consideration.

The tools of human rights violations

Because they are portable and lethal, small arms have the capacity to transform human rights violations into something far more devastating. Frey is noted as indicating that under international human rights law the state can be held responsible for violations committed with small arms by private persons in two situations: when the armed individuals are operating under state authority; and when the state fails to act with due diligence to protect human rights. Serious problems emerge when that authority is abused through police impunity. Ending such impunity is an appropriate focus for small arms control advocacy.

Under due diligence, states must take reasonable steps to prevent, investigate, punish or compensate with regard to human rights violations committed by armed individuals or groups. Due diligence testing involves “more than mere negligence on the part of state officials … it consists of the reasonable measures of prevention that a well-administered government could be expected to exercise under similar
circumstances.” Under a due diligence standard, “it is the omission on the part of the state, not the injurious act by the private actor, for which the state may be responsible.” (Frey 2004). Meeting neglected standards requires appropriate gun owner licensing, firearm registration, safe storage, tracking information, and the investigation and possible prosecution of weapons misuse. It could also entail periodic amnesties to remove unwanted arms from circulation.

Related problems of national reporting are noted, one source claiming that ‘given major shortcomings in the quality and frequency of national reporting, and the lack of comprehensive independent assessments, it is almost impossible to obtain an accurate picture of POA implementation. Strong political cross-winds continue to obstruct discussions that could result in practical and effective improvements to small arms programs in sensitive areas such as effective border controls and controls on small arms ammunition’. (New Zealand Ambassador McLay cited in Batchelor and Kenkel, 2013). Other sources cited emphasise POA’s lack of mechanisms capable of providing independent assessments.

Knowledge the most powerful weapon

Too many governments are unable to provide basic information regarding incidence of gun homicides and injuries, costs to public health and social security systems, or estimates of the number, characteristics, or origin of guns circulating within their jurisdictions. Required is the development of permanent data collection procedures within existing public health or law enforcement systems. However governments are currently reluctant to either support in-depth national research on armed violence, or unwilling to publish or respond to findings on the incidence and effects of armed violence. Lamb (cited interview 2014) sees the evidence base for what works to reduce gun violence as currently weak; concerted programmes of national research are required to fill such gaps. Such research needs complementary data-intensive investigations, and appropriately funded and conducted surveys. Here campaigns could utilise material from New Technology and the Prevention of Violence and Conflict.

Yet even if patchy, quantification can deliver results: what may have been amorphous and elusive can become concrete and comprehensible. Showing what exists as a small arms problem can open the door for improved management. Doing so however will encounter barriers. It is no accident that the NRA in the United States has devoted considerable energy to suppressing or denigrating relevant research and information. This includes using Congressional contacts to block relevant research, targeting individual experts, and pushing for state laws prohibiting cities and counties from passing gun control measures. (Hoyer and Szabo 2013). In 2005 the US Congress passed a law shielding firearms manufacturers from liability lawsuits, though those depositions remain intact. A New York Times review of that material showed firearms industry leaders arguing that their companies bore little responsibility for monitoring dealers and distributors selling guns to the public.

But don’t oversimplify

In some cases lack of data has led to simplification, although there are examples of its needless neglect. Greene and Marsh (2011) have detected over-simplification
about the impact of weapons flows for patterns of violence and insecurity. Likewise, specialists on different types and contexts of violence have too often considered studies on arms questions as secondary to deeper social, economic and political factors driving violence. However as greater knowledge becomes available, then more complex, distinct national and societal situations are appreciated. There is, according to 'What Next?' a wide variety and complexity in the perpetration and victimization of armed violence and, equally, the links between that activity and flows of small arms.

Hardware versus effects

A reason behind the initial focus for research and policy formation on the ‘tools of violence’ was that it suited the dominant ownership narrative emanating from the UN General Assembly’s First Committee. This emphasis on the ‘hardware’ made initial sense given the direct and indirect impacts of the spread and misuse of small arms and light weapons. But this emphasis encountered growing dissatisfaction through failure to more fully encompass humanitarian impacts. The inability of the POA to adequately incorporate humanitarian and development priorities resulted in efforts being directed elsewhere, the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development (2006) an example with its focus on the broader social aspects of armed violence reduction.

Armed violence reduction (AVR) thus entered the advocacy lexicon more strongly. Effects criteria were considered more publicly comprehensible than hardware information. Although it has helped local programming, the AVR approach has not been as suitable for devising advocacy strategies. An ‘everything is everything’ mind-set, where multiple causes may produce manifold effects, does not assist when trying to determine actionable priorities. While comprehending the complexity of armed violence realities, as reflected in the AVR prism, the absolute primacy of small arms in the majority of the world’s manifestations of armed violence must be maintained. Conceptual silos within that spectrum persist, maintained by advocacy groups retaining them to attract funding, and on grounds that such differentiations are required to sustain service delivery.

Mopping the floor with the tap still running?

Currently the planet is not far from reaching one billion firearms, a trajectory that is not levelling off. And small arms production is growing increasingly sophisticated, even to a point of convergence with military standards. Even if properly controlled, marked and recorded, existing stockpiles and levels of small arms production are too high; they erode the transformational changes needed to reduce existing levels of gun violence. However demanding, the challenge is one of vigorous advocacy demanding cuts to existing production levels and stockpile inventories. Marsh (2013) believes civil society needs to expose the cosy relationships that exist between politics, industry, the military and intelligence. It has led to vast sums of unnecessary expenditure on arms, subversion of laws and principles at the heart of democracy, the rule of law, and supplies that maintain authoritarian regimes in power. Karp (2006) recommends stronger confrontational activism, pressing states to change policies and refusing to accept cosmetic accommodations. Supplier governments need to be brought face to face with their international human rights and
humanitarian law obligations and responsibilities.

How many guns does the world need?

While simplistic at first glance, the question of how many guns the world needs can and should be pursued. A neglected aspect of small arms control advocacy is establishment of an agenda designed to control and then reduce small arms stocks from their excessive and destabilising accumulations (Wood interview 2014). Mapping what is actually required for legitimate security purposes could be attempted, such cap limits a lever used to demand reductions of surplus stocks and, for Marsh (2013), getting guns off the streets and out of people’s houses.

Hit them where it hurts… their pockets

‘What Next?’ rates divestment strongly as a national strategy. Often small arms producers are not part of a concentrated military industrial complex rendering them more vulnerable to pressure (Acheson interview 2014). Examples for possible emulation include the Stop Explosive Investment campaign and its ‘Hall of Shame’ list, and the US-based Campaign to Unload and its tagline ‘Are You Invested in Gun Violence?’ Like tobacco banning, the focus can be direct and simple: producing weapons is incompatible with any notion of corporate social responsibility.

Related, but pursued independently could be recommended fiscal measures. In El Salvador part of the guns sales tax has been redirected into public health systems. Many governments tax gun sales which provides a possible focus for enhanced national campaigning. At a macroeconomic level, strong arguments are available to support national campaigning. Muggah and McDougall (2014) note that in the US ‘while citizens bear the costs, it is ultimately the manufacturers, retailers, and marketers that profit from the country’s tsunami of gun violence. What do the numbers tell us? Some 32,163 Americans died of gunshot wounds in 2011. Another 70,000 more were non-fatally injured in the same year, and suffer debilitating physical and psychological scars. The economic cost of those losses has been estimated at $47 billion annually. This grossly exceeds the industry’s economic benefit, as (generously) calculated by the National Shooting Sports Federation, by some $18 billion per year’.

Armed violence is bad for business (weapons sales, private security companies, home protection services excepted) meaning companies within affected settings should be sensitised to the advantages of real investment returns from greatly reduced gun violence. Gun control advocacy needs to foster contacts with commercial and private sector interests accordingly.

Tighten the ’nuts and bolts’

Global levels of surplus small arms stock destruction have been inadequate. It occurs but has not been systematic. Secure stockpile management, which hardly exists as a campaign theme, is critically important. Fortunately credible blueprints for enhanced surplus stock destruction and stockpile management are readily available. They include OECD handbooks and, more recently, the UN sponsored International
Small Arms Control Standards (ISACS). This is a mechanism assisting UN member states to implement effective controls on small arms availability, manufacture, marking and record-keeping, international transfer, tracing, collection, and destruction of illicit weapons. Getting these standards more widely accepted is vital for implementation of weapons destruction, marking and tracing, and brokering. The practical implementation of ISACS at local, national and global levels should be pushed by civil society as many of the standards are common sense, user-friendly, relatively inexpensive, and represent practical gun control measures not dependent on national legislation or international negotiations. ISACS shortcomings include their voluntary nature and absence of ammunition restriction provisions.

Guns don’t kill people, bullets do

Civil society advocacy on small arms ammunition control has been erratic and inconsistent. The ATT requires states parties to establish and maintain national control systems regulating the export of ammunition and munitions, but the exclusion of ammunition control as one of the primary objectives of the treaty was greeted with disappointment. It remains unfinished business for the POA. Macdonald (2014 interview) believes the POA could build ‘add-ons’ through negotiated requirements for ammunition and manufacturing controls. For Jackson (cited by Marsh and Greene 2011) it is ‘no wonder that it is precisely the regions of the world most affected by gun violence that are at the forefront of the call for the inclusion of ammunition in the POA. From Mercosur to CARICOM, from Central American to African nations, these countries know that inclusion of ammunition would improve the tools at their disposal to undertake efforts to help keep their citizens alive’. Hence political appetite already exists for steps for either divestment or direct lobbying on ammunition supply reductions. In its research and policy work, civil society could distil this to better highlight the impact of uncontrolled ammunition flows in worsening conflict in settings already awash with weapons (MacDonald 2014 interview). The ammunition industry is relatively concentrated: as of 2011 just 15 states accounted for 90 per cent of all small arms ammunition production, much of that state-owned. Such concentration offers enhanced scope for direct advocacy.

Power to the people

The importance of broadening advocacy beyond governments to include non-state societal institutions is increasingly acknowledged. Depending on individual settings, such formations can mobilise informal authority structures, social norms and cultural practices. That is possible because gun cultures are neither fixed nor unchangeable. Enhanced societal control over guns can be collectively negotiated – whether that comprises part of a political settlement, a weapon amnesty, or security sector reform. It may require tangible reductions of impunity within police or other state-sanctioned agencies employing force. The boundary dividing what is or is not countered, investigated, punished, or prevented by state institutions can be fluid and shifting (Greene 2011). Where that line is drawn directly relates to the types and scale of small arms available (Greene 2011). The key test for advocates is finding out why and how community rules allowing firearms – even encouraging them – are modified by a gradual extinguishing of perceived need, as occurred historically in Japan.

Better understanding demand – the preferences, prices and resources that shape
acquisition, possession and misuse of small arms – particularly by individuals is essential. This information requires accessibility and comprehension by policy makers. So far as homicide rates are concerned, the formation of an under 10 annually per 100,000 global club could forge a common identity using collective incentives to reduce such killing. (Moyes 2014 interview).

Failures to communicate

Experts cited (Cattaneo, Krause, Nash) emphasise the pressing need to share existing best practices internationally. This will require greater effort by advocacy groups to communicate more with each other. Deploying knowledge of what works is important. This is as important as communicating with governments, which may filter out information or advice that they deem unimportant. Time spent in attempting to influence legislation should be matched by activities that promote, implement and help enforce existing rules and norms. Here, meeting human rights and humanitarian law obligations are obvious examples.

While a multilingual, policy-oriented, searchable online platform of the most important knowledge on armed violence reduction may be a long term objective, advocacy groups can begin moving in that direction. Here some regional initiatives deserve note, such as the Mapping Citizen Security database by Instituto Igarapé. That is better than relying on long publications (like ‘What Next?’) that risk relegation to book shelves.

Make the news

Revitalised efforts to use the news media can pay dividends. Disseminated information needs to be fresh, topical and factual. Although often underfunded and poorly resourced in conflict settings, investigative journalism can help uncover the opaque nature of domestic arms sales and transfers. Data journalism and its graphic representations of knowledge is a further avenue to follow.

The best examples of social media use have shown that traditional print and television outlets can be bypassed as information gatekeepers. NGOs can consider developing apps rather than papers such as this, sleek webinars rather than seminars, Prezis online rather than Powerpoints at the UN. Technical partnerships can further these skills and methods. Like a gun, a given technology is but a tool, but one with immense transformative potential for good or ill. Regardless of how it is done, what the message contains, or who the intended recipients may be, civil society advocacy on gun control needs to update its technical toolbox.

Just do it

Attention to sub-national levels crystallises a common suggestion about what needs to be communicated by civil society. When it comes to gun violence, much of the knowledge and evidence that exists often fails to reach those ‘operators’ able to render it useful within particular locations. This transmission need not involve governments or diplomatic procedures, being capable of generating its own synergies. Here an option is engaging mayors of municipalities, encouraging them to
form coalitions of common interest against gun violence. Such initiatives can extend regionally and even globally.

Another initiative might involve pressure for strengthened police accountability. Information and communications technologies for development can be harnessed to break gun violence, sexual abuse linkages, and wider societal violence. Real time data collection through mobile phone use and social media can anticipate or flag potential gun violence trouble. Stronger data can help discern patterns between guns and ammunition purchases and violence.

But I’m addicted to the UN

A common perception elucidated by the evaluation is that civil society’s balance of advocacy strategies relies too heavily on direct advocacy at the UN and too little on in-capital work. Furthermore ‘civil society seems to have succeeded in shifting their old mass campaigning and awareness activities into this new venue (UN), but only clumsily translated their direct lobbying capacity. Overrepresentation due to the novelty (and likely a certain amount of herd-effect) of negotiating directly in the UN headquarters has sucked valuable resources away from other, less visible but more effective strategies.’ (Greene in Batchelor and Kenkel, 2013).

Regardless of differing appraisals about the potential impact for each UN-based process, as a collective civil society is spending too much of its limited time, effort and funds in New York (and Geneva). Undoubtedly, the financial costs of orbiting around major diplomatic process in those cities are exorbitant, in fact prohibitive to many of the civil society actors, particularly those from the ‘global South’ actually affected by armed violence. There are also significant non-financial costs in terms of distance, both physical and mental, from the local realities requiring transformation. As noted by Bob Zuber, it is essential to insist that advocates are connected to communities of practice far removed from the global centres of self-importance like UN headquarters in New York.

While POA guidelines remain essential, the time and effort allocated to their diplomatic processes is questioned. Part of the problem has been the amount of political oxygen that the UN’s ATT processed sucked out of the POA process, civil society activism faulted for its failure to properly confront either over neglect of needed ammunition restrictions.

The UN Human Rights Council needs to engage gun violence as a gross rights violation through its Universal Periodic Review Process (UPR). The 2012 UPR for Brazil, for example, barely mentioned gun violence, not even under sections regarding the commitments to the ‘Right to life, liberty and security of the person’ or under recommendations for ‘Promoting public security and combating violence’. The UN Human Rights Council should consider establishing a United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Prevention of Human Rights Violations Committed with Small Arms and Lights Weapons.

Change the rules of the game

Civil society advocacy needs to adopt stronger confrontational tactics at the UN. This
includes intensifying demands for UN Security Council reform and change to the General Assembly’s decrepit, default decision-making procedures. Here, abuse of consensus is behind much failure and stalemate. The General Assembly’s First Committee, dealing with disarmament, follows practices and procedures considered anachronistic. Zuber (interview 2014) suggests that civil society would do better to strike a more informed balance between issue advocacy, and attention to the structures of the institutions within which such advocacy occurs. Moreover, norms do not need to be part of a treaty in order to have a constitutive or transformative impact. They can establish prohibitions on what is increasingly considered inappropriate (eg child soldiering), and can set recommendations for new directions. These approaches can escape the dead hand of consensus and major power hierarchy at the UN.

Regional Measures

David Atwood (interviewed 2014) claims ‘regional processes have proven more valuable than global discussions’ given shared realities and perceptions allowing them to lead not follow global frameworks. Regional sites offer good prospects for norm enhancement and may prove robust locations for their consolidation. Some useful initiatives have occurred, but they have been inadequate in tackling rampant gun violence (Greene 2011). UN regional disarmament offices, such as UNLIREC for Latin America, can serve as valuable partners for civil society contemplating a regional focus.

That said, regional diplomacy on small arms control has been in relative decline and its results mixed. An early assessment of POA implementation (Biting the Bullet), found ‘some evidence that the existence of regional-level small arms mechanisms, resources, and expertise made a qualitative difference to the overall implementation processes in countries with governments broadly supportive of the POA goals. On the other hand, some hard-negotiated regional mechanisms were ‘barely used in practice’. (Greene in Batchelor and Kenkel, 2013). Moreover arms flows within particular regions may run counter to global trends. This underlines requirements for enhanced research and analysis within regions, Latin America deficient in this regard.

After 2015

For the immediate future, one pathway lies in having armed violence concerns integrated into post-2015 Millennium Development Goal agendas. Possible indicators could include having the rate of annual homicides per 100,000 reduced to below 10 per country. Governments resisting such integration need confronting with assertions that development, however conceptualised, is fundamentally compromised under conditions of small arms proliferation and gun violence. These epidemics deserve the public salience and donor attention accorded to HIV/AIDS and, more recently, Ebola outbreaks. The problems involved relate to climate change, as with desertification in the Sahel, and to worsening global inequality, as with recourse to armed criminality following widening youth male unemployment.

Advocacy strategies need to consider other strategies that, over the long term, have worked to effect: tobacco, gay marriage, drunk driving, and some environmental
issues. Involved has been striking the right balance between research and advocacy, and maintaining appropriate focus, as needed, between local, national and international action (Marsh interview 2014).

A final word about funding

A concern expressed involves the relatively small number of governments assisting with funding on small arms control advocacy, and the scope that this has given them to act as gatekeepers. Trust and cooperation with funding governments is imperative, but so is a healthy independence from their interests and objectives. Contrast and contest between NGOs and funding governments can foster innovation. A good way to maintain independence is to pursue and consolidate information gathering for its own sake. Let the deployed facts speak for themselves. NGOs worried about undue influence from donor governments need to assess their strategic direction; if not, they risk being allocated tasks donors consider least controversial or demanding.

Some developed country NGOs may evince little interest or empathy towards often tedious, but essential programmes of stockpile management, gun registration, and administrative integrity that are critically needed in fragile state locations. Karp (2006) sees such blind spots becoming tautological; the goals of small arms control activity being whatever it does. This may explain why it has been difficult to generate excitement for an issue beyond the experience and empathy of a dedicated programme of advocacy, its sights set on the next round of diplomatic activity in Geneva or New York. If it is to continue to develop, and progress toward more ambitious goals of influencing not just specific conflict episodes but conflict as a generic, then small arms activity must assume control over its identity. Here the movement must delineate its own, distinctive long-term objectives. (Karp 2006).

Conclusion: what next after 'What Next?'

‘What Next?’ aims to foster a needed brainstorming exercise by global civil society active on small arms control and violence reduction. Its advocates are urged to maintain active internal dialogue over aims and objectives, accept external criticism in good faith, and maintain regular processes of review and evaluation. The misuse and effects of small arms should serve as a common, galvanising rallying point complemented by attention to other forms of violence, weaponry and relevant geographical scope. A ‘whole of society’ approach is needed to tackle the intractable realities of armed violence around the world.

Governments should be both more generous, but also more demanding of civil society small arms advocacy and activism. Equally small arms and gun control advocacy needs to acknowledge that civil society extends well beyond NGO formations to include educational, public sector, religious and minority culture communities. Emerging economies of the South need to put their money where their mouths are by funding global human security initiatives – South Africa and Brazil take note. The political constraints under which they operate in the United States should not hinder some of the largest, most generous private foundations supporting global efforts for curbing gun violence.
Some urgency attaches to responding to the broad range of problems traversed in "What Next?" Greene (2103) believes that small arms researchers and associated transnational advocacy networks are no longer widely regarded by international policy makers, or funders, as a particularly dynamic and important focus of international negotiations or norm setting. That view may be disputed but deserves acknowledgment. At any rate, taking stock at this juncture is essential. Where warranted, a collective mea culpa of sorts can provide the spur for shaping a clear-eyed vision of the future. Readers are accordingly invited to provide their feedback to this paper.

A PSAAG Response

This summary of "What Next?" has been circulated to PSAAG and the following points have been made.

1. "What Next?" has great value as a source document that deserves constant revisiting. It will greatly assist in ongoing processes designed to re-evaluate terms of reference and how best to shape organisational structure to meet challenges both new and enduring.

2. Since its formation in 2009, PSAAG has sought to follow such an approach. In 2010 it agreed to:
   - Build a collective understanding among PSAAG members about problems of arms proliferation and armed violence in the Pacific through knowledge exchange and dialogue;
   - Identify strategic areas requiring joint focus in the next two years;
   - Develop an action plan accordingly;
   - Revise and agree terms of reference to better clarify structure and organisational processes.

As well, issues of international small arms control, their Pacific regional implications, and continued member recruitment were addressed.

In 2014, PSAAG held an important face to face consultation in Suva, Fiji, where it was agreed, inter alia, to:
   - conduct a full internal review of all operations now required under an altered funding dispensation;
   - clarify and rank relevant priorities and revisit existing terms of reference;
   - prepare a strategic plan encompassing national, regional and international aims and objectives;
   - and attend to issues of communication, member recruitment, and international partnership arrangements.

Of note here is that PSAAG has found it necessary to not only maintain a regular watching brief on its activities but designate, and then plan for full scale reviews of its activities within reasonable time spans dividing such events.

3. PSAAG notes with interest the parent document’s concern about advocacy programmes being unduly influenced by treaty formation and intergovernmental
cycles of conference activity. To an extent, some of this has been unavoidable, as over the ATT and POA. Yet we have a particular concern regarding actual benefit for small Pacific island state delegations in relation to costs entailed.

4. That concern is in part ameliorated through concentrated effort at regional levels, though that, of itself, will not ensure required collaboration. In 2013, PSAAG developed recommendations for tabling at a Pacific Leaders’ meeting encouraging signature of the ATT, this preceded by considerable workshop effort towards ATT and POA objectives.

5. Like kindred organisations PSAAG struggles with inadequate data from within its own region. The emphasis given by ‘What Next?’ to this often difficult but essential task was welcomed.

6. Organising and funding that activity highlights a further, widely shared problem among kindred organisation which is one of task completion. Initial motivation and commitment is strong, but so are competing demands placed on the time and availability of often voluntary human resources. Useful initiatives are begun but then mark time through mixed progress in reporting, implementation and evaluation.

7. PSAAG acknowledges the source report’s claim that mainstreaming gender and environmental concerns into the small arms and gun control mandate represents a substantial challenge. PSAAG partly met this when, in June 2014, it unanimously agreed to strengthen its focus with the publication of ‘Arms, Gender and Security in the Pacific.’

8. PSAAG notes the need for advocacy groups to communicate internationally with what they have found to be best practice. Granted, the Pacific situation is unique. By avoiding, and at times even reversing the steady proliferation of illegal firearms and death by gunshot, our island nations have forged a little known, but startling regional consensus to remain unarmed. The current crisis of confidence in the UN small arms Programme of Action and its unfunded NGO networks demands that regional and local civil society and governments step up to the plate, especially where they have an encouraging message for stakeholders in contrasting situations.

9. Overall, ‘What Next?’ deserves continued reference and appraisal as a valued source. PSAAG commends its originators and contributors for their ideas, and reflected experiences. They deserve dissemination and response.