



## FIREARMS CONTROL BRIEFING

### GLOBAL STRATEGIES TO REDUCE VIOLENCE

#### HISTORICAL MOMENT

“2015 is a chance to change history” said UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon: this includes a chance to revolutionise our approach to violence prevention.<sup>1</sup> The Secretary-General was referring to the gathering of world leaders at the United Nations in New York in September 2015 to adopt the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – the international development framework, which acknowledges that to address development more holistically, issues such as justice, inequality, and climate change need to take centre stage.<sup>2</sup> As the world focuses its attention on the post-2015 development agenda, with the significant inclusion of **goal 16**:

*“to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels,”<sup>3</sup>*

the most pressing question being posed: ‘is it possible to reduce violence by half over the next 30 years and can we find better ways to protect those most vulnerable to violence?’<sup>4</sup>

One of the reasons the post-2015 development framework has been expanded to include violence reduction is recognition of the negative impact of violence and insecurity on development: violence and insecurity affect societies, extending beyond the immediate costs of death and injuries and include the migration or displacement of people, dwindling investments, loss of income through business closures, and weakening of the legitimacy of state institutions.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore inter-personal violence is strongly associated with macro-level social factors such as unemployment, income inequality and rapid social change.<sup>6</sup>

South Africa has a unique responsibility to ensure that it adopts and implements the SDGs: as a country we carry the double burden of being in the top 18 countries with the highest homicide rates globally; and being among the most unequal societies in the world.<sup>7</sup> However, South Africa has also committed itself through both the National Development Plan and the White Paper on Safety and Security to put in place the building blocks for creating a safe society: a society in which all people living in South Africa ‘should feel safe and have no fear of crime.’<sup>8</sup> There is no doubt that South Africa needs to be part of the global effort to reduce violence by half over the next 30 years.

#### VIOLENCE ACROSS THE WORLD<sup>9</sup>

The 2015 *Global Burden of Armed Violence Report* shows that there has been a steady decrease in the average annual number of violent deaths worldwide over the last ten years: from 540,000 (2004-2007) to 508,000 (2007-12). For the period under review (2007-2012), the average global rate of violent death is 7.4 persons killed per 100, 000 population, with South Africa posting an annual murder rate of over 30 per 100,000

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<sup>1</sup> Addressing youth at the UN Economic and Social Council Youth Forum in February 2015 on the topic *Transitioning from MDGs to SDGs: Engaging Youth*.

<sup>2</sup> The Open Working Group on the SDGs will present a document which lists 17 goals clustered around six broad thematic areas: dignity, prosperity, justice, partnerships, people and the planet.

<sup>3</sup> Each proposed goal is accompanied by targets focused on measurable outcomes. The first target under Goal 16: ‘to significantly reduce all forms of violence and related deaths everywhere.’

<sup>4</sup> *Global Strategies to Reduce Violence by 50% in 30 Years: Findings from the WHO and University of Cambridge Global Violence Reduction Conference 2014*. //www.vrc.crim.cam.ac.uk/vrcpublications.

<sup>5</sup> Geneva Declaration Secretariat. 2015. *Global Burden of Armed Violence 2015*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>6</sup> Geneva Declaration Secretariat. 2015. *Global Burden of Armed Violence 2015*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations office on Drugs and Crime. *Global Study on Homicide 2013: Trends/Contexts/Data*. UNODC. Vienna.

<sup>8</sup> National Development Plan 2030. *Our Future-make it work*. National Planning Commission. The Presidency. Pretoria. p.53.

<sup>9</sup> All the data used in this section (unless indicated otherwise) is drawn from the Executive Summary of Geneva Declaration Secretariat. 2015. *Global Burden of Armed Violence 2015*. pp 1-10. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



population. The data also shows that ‘lethal violence was highly concentrated among a small group of countries’: the 18 countries (including South Africa) with the highest violent death rates are home to only four per cent of the world’s population, yet account for 24 per cent of all violent deaths in the world.<sup>10</sup> Over the same period, the average annual number of female homicides also shows a slight decrease, from 66, 000 to 60,000. However, of the 360,000 women killed over this period, more than half of them lost their lives in one of the 25 countries with the highest rates of female homicide, with South Africa topping the list in third place. The data also shows that ‘the proportion of women who are killed by a firearm – as opposed to other mechanisms – is greater in areas that exhibit high rates of firearm homicides.’

Furthermore, firearms are used in almost half (46.3 per cent) of all homicides globally. Armed violence has a significant negative impact on sustainable development and human security: one of the main contributing factors towards ongoing high levels of armed violence is the widespread, uncontrolled use and distribution of firearms.<sup>11</sup> Failure to control and reduce the number of guns in the hands of civilians in post-conflict contexts, and to restrict access to guns in non-conflict settings, can significantly prolong cycles of poverty and jeopardise peace and stability: controlling and reducing guns in civilian hands is therefore a priority.<sup>12</sup>

Collecting and analysing data on the patterns and dynamics of lethal violence is crucial to understanding its causes and consequences, and providing indicators of what helps to reduce and prevent violence thereby enhancing the design of effective violence prevention and reduction strategies.

### **KEY ELEMENTS TO REDUCE AND PREVENT VIOLENCE<sup>13</sup>**

In September 2014, the World Health Organization (WHO) and Cambridge University Violence Research Centre co-hosted the *Global Violence Reduction Conference* at which policy makers, academics, researchers, and civil society actors gathered to review what impact a decade of violence prevention interventions had achieved and to discuss how scientific knowledge can better contribute to more effective violence prevention efforts. The public health approach to violence reduction informed much of the discussion, of which the three key elements are:<sup>14</sup>

- Understanding violence and the factors that influence violent behaviour;
- Identifying risk and protective factors for violent behaviour; and
- Developing evidence-based programmes that target factors associated with engaging in violence, organised into primary, secondary and tertiary interventions.

The Conference identified six key policy recommendations to meet the target of reducing violence by 50 per cent over the next 30 years; this briefing explores only four of the recommendations, emphasising what is effective in violence prevention efforts across the world.

### **Tackle the biggest problem areas first: top violent cities and hot spots**

Some types of violence are highly concentrated and persistent over time: for example, in Sucre, Venezuela, 80% of the annual homicides occur in six per cent of street segments. Identifying the top violent cities and concentrating violence prevention efforts in these locales is essential to reducing violence. Other recommendations for successful interventions include: investing in urban planning of the fastest growing cities as they are the most vulnerable to violence (two of the fastest growing cities in South Africa are Rustenburg and Cape Town; Cape Town experienced increased levels of violence after the rapid growth in informal housing

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<sup>10</sup> Small Arms Survey Press release on 11 May 2015: *Every Body Counts. Violent deaths decrease: yet armed conflict grows more lethal.* [www.smallarmssurvey.org](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org)

<sup>11</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD). 2009. *Armed Violence Reduction. Enabling Development.* OECD. Paris.

<sup>12</sup> Buchanan, Cate and M Widmer. 2006. *Transitioning to Peace. Guns in Civilian Hands.* Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. Geneva.

<sup>13</sup> This section is drawn primarily from the *Global Strategies to Reduce Violence by 50% in 30 Years: Findings from the WHO and University of Cambridge Global Violence Reduction Conference 2014*; all assertions and recommendations are based on evidence which is referenced in the Report.

<sup>14</sup> World Health Organization. 2009. *Violence prevention: the evidence: overview.* WHO. Geneva.



due to a net migration of 100% between 2001 and 2006; and in response the provincial government developed an 'Integrated Provincial Violence Prevention Policy' with programmes targeting high-risk areas);<sup>15</sup> identifying hot spots in cities through systematic data collection for hot-spot mapping; and promoting mutual learning between cities about good practices in violence prevention.

### **Harness the power of Big Data: develop data, access and standards**

Data is central to developing good policy; and obtaining good data requires investment in developing the tools that can provide accurate and up to date information such as population surveys and surveillance systems as well as developing a global knowledge base.<sup>16</sup> South Africa is one of the few countries on the continent with a well-developed (although uneven) mortuary surveillance system as well as having the ability to conduct population and victim surveys.<sup>17</sup> Other findings include: strengthening violence prevention research capacity in low-and middle-income countries through cooperation between research institutes, as well as training in evidence-based research practices; making violence prevention data more accessible through open-source software, online databases and data visualisation programmes; and establishing observatories to coordinate the monitoring and evaluation of violence prevention programmes (this is currently being explored in the Western Cape).

### **Protect the most vulnerable: youth**

Children and adolescents are the most at risk of violence; and as 80% of the world's youth live in low-and middle-income countries, violence against youth is especially prevalent in these countries. Furthermore homicide rates peak during adolescence, with young men being at the highest risk of perpetration and victimisation.<sup>18</sup> For example, in South Africa, 89 per cent of firearm homicide victims are young men between 15 and 29 years.<sup>19</sup> Findings for effective prevention strategies include: replicating positive parenting programmes, giving more attention to the role of fathers; recognising the vulnerability of young men in youth violence prevention programmes and policy; and developing more gender-sensitive initiatives that transform gender norms by actively engaging boys and men (which is currently being carried out in South Africa by Sonke Gender Justice).

### **Institutional Context matters: governance and policies for violence prevention**

High violence societies tend to have poor functioning institutions characterised by disrespect for institutional rules (e.g. high levels of corruption), lack of participatory mechanisms in decision-making, and lack of compliance with the rule of law. Other findings include: promoting access to executive leadership training in violence prevention; integrating violence prevention policies within existing policies such as education and health as well as socio-economic policies; and empowering police leadership with a sense of 'self-legitimacy' is a necessary condition to build legitimate police institutions that can reduce crime and violence.

## **WHAT WORKS AND WHY?**

Given the complex manifestation of violence across society and its varied causes, successes in violence reduction have never been due to one particular intervention or programme: violence declined because whole

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<sup>15</sup> Richard Matzopoulos quoted in the *Global Strategies to Reduce Violence by 50% in 30 Years: Findings from the WHO and University of Cambridge Global Violence Reduction Conference 2014*. p.28

<sup>16</sup> Geneva Declaration Secretariat. 2015. *Global Burden of Armed Violence 2015*.pp 1-10. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.10

<sup>17</sup> Geneva Declaration Secretariat. 2009. *Understanding Violence. The Role of Injury Surveillance Systems in Africa*. Working Paper. Geneva.

<sup>18</sup> *Global Strategies to Reduce Violence by 50% in 30 Years: Findings from the WHO and University of Cambridge Global Violence Reduction Conference 2014*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge 2015. p.48

<sup>19</sup> Matzopoulos, Richard et al. 2015. Injury-related mortality in South Africa: a retrospective study of post-mortem investigations. *Bulletin World Health Organization* 2015; 93:303-313.



systems changed.<sup>20</sup> However, there are a number of common systemic factors across diverse contexts that have shown to be effective in reducing violence: reforming criminal justice systems; changing values and cultures; and paying attention to those most at risk for violence:

- There is overwhelming evidence that “low levels of inter-personal violence go side by side with an effective, fair, and legitimate criminal justice system.”<sup>21</sup> This includes a police that is seen as an agency that services its community (and not as the enemy); and a judiciary that deals with cases effectively and humanely.
- One of the most challenging yet effective ways to substantially reduce violence is to shift values and attitudes that regard the use of violence as legitimate. This type of behavioural change has been particularly effective in areas such as smoking and HIV prevention, and lessons can be drawn from these interventions and how best to apply them to inter-personal violence.

Another useful public health framework is differentiating between risk and protective factors for violence: risk factors are those characteristics or conditions that increase the likelihood of violence occurring, while protective factors are shields that reduce or eliminate these risks.<sup>22</sup> Lastly, understanding the risk and protective factors associated with engaging in violence, helps shape the intervention strategies. For example, primary prevention programmes take place before the violence occurs, and this can include removing guns from homes in which domestic violence occurs.

#### **Example: Reducing Gun Violence<sup>23</sup>**

The public health approach has played a significant role in understanding some of the risk factors for gun related violence, namely: availability and easy access to guns; and availability and harmful use of alcohol.

Evidence shows that limiting access to firearms (especially for young men between 15-29 years-old) can prevent homicides, suicides and injuries, thereby reducing the costs of these forms of violence. The data also shows that countries with ‘restrictive’ firearms law and lower firearm ownership levels tend to have lower levels of gun violence. These measures also include national firearms amnesties, effective enforcement of legislation, and improved security for state owned firearms. Strategies are also needed to reduce the demand for guns, such as diverting vulnerable youth away from gang membership.

Evidence is also emerging that violence may be prevented by reducing the availability of alcohol through interventions for problem drinkers (not just those addicted to alcohol) and by improving the management of environments where alcohol is served. Other interventions that are showing results in reducing alcohol related violence include: restricting the hours or days it can be sold; and reducing the number of alcohol retail outlets. Economic modelling is also beginning to show that raising alcohol prices can lower consumptions, and hence, reduce violence.

## **CONCLUSION**

Violence can be prevented: the factors that contribute to people engaging in violence can be changed. And South Africa can be part of that change by joining the global community in its efforts to reduce violence by 50 per cent over the next 30 years: one immediate intervention is to place those most vulnerable to engaging in acts of violence at the centre of violence prevention interventions, namely boys and young men.

<sup>20</sup> *Global Strategies to Reduce Violence by 50% in 30 Years: Findings from the WHO and University of Cambridge Global Violence Reduction Conference 2014*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge 2015.

<sup>21</sup> *Global Strategies to Reduce Violence by 50% in 30 Years: Findings from the WHO and University of Cambridge Global Violence Reduction Conference 2014*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge 2015. p.73

<sup>22</sup> World Health Organization. 2009. *Violence prevention: the evidence: overview*. WHO. Geneva.

<sup>23</sup> World Health Organization. 2009. *Guns, knives, and pesticides: reducing access to lethal means*. WHO. Geneva.