

## **Disarm gun violence as 65% illegal arms perpetuate violence against women**

Speakers call for strict check on proliferation of small arms

ISLAMABAD, 17<sup>th</sup> June 2011: No more time to let gun violence continue as 65% illegal firearms are being used to perpetuate violence against women and 94% of perpetrators use such arms directly to threaten their wives, said a recent study conducted in four districts of South Punjab.

The study conducted by AwazCDS on 'Status of Domestic Gun Violence against Women in districts Multan, Muzafargarh, Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur' was launched at a seminar on 'Proliferation of Small Arms and their Impact on Internal Security Dynamics' jointly organized by Awaz- Center for Development Studies, Community Appraisal and Motivation Programme (CAMP) and Journalists for Democracy and Human Rights (JDHR). The seminar was organized in connection with Global Week of Action against Gun Violence being observed in more than 70 countries till Sunday (19<sup>th</sup> June). The International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) has given the call for observance of the week.

Giving highlights from the study, Ms Sadia Saeed from Awaz said farmers and labourers were found extensively involved in the gun and threats. The findings say 49% rifles were not used only to threaten but also used for beating and whipping woman at home. In 86% cases, police tried to hush up the matter saying they are their family or private petty disputes and avoided registration of First Information Report (FIR).

Speaking on the occasion, Shafqat Munir, Editor INFN and president JDHR, said media could play a pro-active role in exposing those elements, who use guns against women thus violating basic human rights. He said state laws and policies should ensure prohibition of gun violence. Quoting from the study, he called for strict criteria for licensing of arms. He said media should make 'rooting out of gun culture and proliferation of small arms from society' part of their news agenda. Television through drama and documentaries should show discouraging trends so that people hate the gunrunners and perpetrators of violence against women.

Earlier, setting the scene, Ziaur Rahmand CEO of Awaz- Center for Development Services said, "This week is an opportunity for our government to listen to the voices of survivors; announce its support for strong and effective policies to prevent gun violence and pledge to provide the necessary assistance to all those who suffer the effects of this global epidemic. There is no time to lose." He said the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) has been including survivors in campaigns to raise awareness and ensure more prominence for the survivor issue, promote survivor rights and assistance, campaign for better gun laws and push for stronger regulation of the global arms trade.

In his opening remarks, Naveed Shinwari, CEO CAMP said more than one million people a year are believed to be direct survivors of armed violence and their miseries remind us of our responsibility to raise voice against the gun culture. Many millions more are affected by armed violence, through the trauma of losing a family member, or of being threatened at gunpoint, including armed domestic violence, and sexual violence against women, men and children. Statistics alone can't tell you what they think should be done, or what could have prevented the violence from occurring, or

how it could be prevented in the future. However, survivors of gun violence are in a unique position to do so, he added.

Salma Malik, Associate Professor Quaid-e-Azam University said small arms and light weapons are proving to be real weapons of mass destruction and are fast changing the face of wars and conflicts. Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) kill people world wide, in comparison to the weapons of mass destruction, which are at best weapons of political currency. Global statistics indicate these trends only, where scores of people have died in civil and internal wars. She said there are many myths surrounding the issue of SALW, such as these being manageable weapons, they are cultural manifestations, the issue has been blown out of proportion, can be controlled. They are not a big problem in comparison to other issues. However, none of these things prove true, as they are weapons that kill and effect civilizations and their economic costs are very high.

Nabila Jafar, student of Quaid-e-Azam University while presenting her study said FATA is the most vulnerable region where the abundance of small arms and light weapons is one of the factors which has increased intensity and durations of conflicts. The area, in which the natural warriors (Tribes) are inhabitant, has been used as a gate way for various invasions. Acquainted with gun culture and fierce behavior against enemies has made this area attractive for the warlords to exploit the local population. The weapons have not only changed the security dynamics of Pakhtoon areas but also their cultural dynamics. The term gun culture was used for the tribal people because their affinity toward the ornaments of war.