



Weapons trade

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Implementation of recommendations from the previous period

The 2018 UPR recommendations do not mention the issue of arms trafficking and how it impacts human rights, particularly the rights of women and children in Colombia. Despite this, on different occasions the United Nations Security Council has highlighted the connection between arms trafficking and armed conflict situations, including forced recruitment. Similarly, in 2020, the UNODC declared that “firearms decisively contribute to violence, especially homicides” (1) and it is evident that the most recurrent method of committing femicide involves these weapons.

However, this issue has yet to be highlighted in the UPR. Of particular interest is the connection between arms trafficking, high homicide rates, and the risk of recruitment, use, and involvement of children in criminal acts for which they are deprived of their liberty. These problems reflect the lack of effective regulation and corporate capture (2) that has ended up impacting the interests of children and adolescents in Colombia. An example of this was the case of three executives from the German company SIG Sauer who were convicted by the Regional Court of Kiel for illegally exporting 38,000 pistols from Germany through the U.S. to Colombia.

Current status

Colombia has one of the highest rates of firearm homicides in the region (3) and ranks fifth globally for firearm deaths. (4) According to the Small Arms Survey report, in 2017 it was estimated that in Colombia there were 4,971,000 weapons in civilian hands, of which 86% (4,264,790) are illegal and 14% (706,210) are legally registered.

According to data requested from DIJIN, between 2015 and 2022, a total of 165,463 firearms were seized and 8,982 adolescents were apprehended under Article 365 “Manufacturing, trafficking, carrying, possessing firearms, accessories, parts, or ammunition.”

According to figures from the Ombuds Office, as of July 2021, 7,754 adolescents and youth had committed a crime and were brought before the Adolescent responsibility System. In cases that resulted in incarceration, 90% are male and 10% are female. The crimes with the highest number of prison terms include trafficking, manufacturing, or carrying narcotics; theft; domestic violence; personal injury; and manufacturing, trafficking, carrying, possession of firearms, accessories, parts, and ammunition.

(1) UNODC. Global Firearms Trafficking Survey, 2020, No. E.20.IV.1.

(2) Global Firearms Holdings. There are more than one billion firearms in the world, the vast majority of which are in civilian hands. March 2020. Press release. Available at: <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/database/global-firearms-holdings>

(3) In 2019, 18 per 100,000 inhabitants, which was a figure higher than the United States (4.5 for 2017) and Mexico (16.5 for 2017). (Fundación Ideas para la Paz, 2020).

(4) It is estimated that between 70% and 80% of homicides are carried out using firearms. Most cases are in rural areas. Firearms are also used in suicides and to commit crimes such as making threats, intimidation, and theft (FIP, 2020). (Journal of the American Medical Association - JAMA)

Children are also direct victims of the use of these weapons by both legal and illegal actors. According to data from Forensic Medicine in 2019, 15.9% of those killed by firearms in Colombia were under 18 years of age. In the context of the 2021 National Strike, four minors were killed with firearms, one using a Sig Sauer brand firearm. (5)

According to the Colombian Femicide Observatory operated by the Red Feminista Antimilitarista, as of 20 June 2023, 179 femicides had been reported for the year. A majority of these, 94 cases (52.5%), were victims of firearms. Firearms were also the favored weapon for this crime in 2019 and 2022. (6)

It should be noted that the proportion of firearms held by Colombians, both legally and illegally, is similar to the figure from 24 years ago: there were 9,497 firearms per 100,000 inhabitants in 1994 compared to 10,091 in 2017. (7) These figures show that the State has a very minimal and ineffective control of firearm circulation.

(5) Public Issue. Press Release. Transacciones mortales: las armas alemanas que silenciaron civiles durante el paro nacional. June 23, 2023. Available at: <https://cutt.ly/fNzEFex>

(6) In 2022, of the 614 femicides registered in the country, 336 or 55% were committed with firearms (Dynamic report from the Observatory of Femicides in Colombia), similar to the 56.8% rate in 2019 (Colombia Diversa, 2020).

7) Fundación Ideas para la Paz (FIP). Colombia: un gran mercado de armas sin incentivos para reducirlo. 27 July 2020. Available at: <https://ideaspaz.org/publicaciones/investigaciones-analisis/2020-07/colombia-un-gran-mercado-de-armas-sin-incentivos-para-reducirlo>

Recommendations

1. Finalize the Arms Trade Treaty ratification process (Law 2289 of 2023).
2. Guarantee the participation of children, youth, and women in the implementation of Law 2289 of 2023 and in discussions on the illicit trafficking of firearms and ammunition, as well as involving communities and civil society in these actions. There is a need to establish monitoring mechanisms to identify the impact that firearms are having on the lives of children and youth, taking into account their experiences of becoming involved in, belonging to, and leaving armed groups.
3. Design a disarmament policy that includes effective control over local and international sales and the handling of arms by different types of consumers, such as the military, the private security sector, and ordinary citizens. It is also important to coordinate local, regional, and national initiatives in this area, and improve arms registration systems.