

Coalition-building

A Canadian initiative could concentrate on building a coalition of like-minded actors. Members of such a coalition would include net contributors (those who can provide assistance) and net recipients (those who are facing the problems). More specifically, the members would consist of representatives of civil society and NGOs (human rights organisations, women's groups, children's rights organisations, the medical community, public health organisations) in addition to states and IGOs (UN, OAS, UNDP, WHO). Some of these organisations and groups are already active in certain aspects of the small arms issue and could have their initiatives strengthened by expanding the members and including those that are not currently active. To strengthen the coalition, opponents would also be encouraged to participate in order to build bridges and to bring them on side early in the process. A coalition could begin with like-minded actors characterised as responsible users of small arms who would focus on specific issues. Once such a basis is formed, the coalition could then expand and begin to tackle more difficult problems. For instance, supply issues could be addressed initially before advancing to demand issues which are more complex.

Membership in the coalition would be particularly essential for NGOs and other members of civil societies that are otherwise ignored or denied access by their own governments. In situations where groups are active in the small arms issue but their governments are not, participation by these groups in a coalition could be a critical factor in mobilising the government to get involved.

Coalition-building starts at the local level, between domestic constituencies and national governments, and then advances to the international level. Participants recognized that trade-offs and compromises are to be expected and decisions would need to be made about what compromises are acceptable.

Norm-building

A Canadian initiative could consider a norm-building dimension in the process based in part on the stigmatisation of small arms. Specific stigmatisation would focus on irresponsible trafficking, the ease with which such dangerous and damaging weapons are being used as symbolised in the image of the child soldier, and on humanitarian costs of small arms: the impact of small arms on children, women, families, societies.

The International Criminal Court being established could also play a role in norm-building whereby, in considering matters relating to genocide and crimes against humanity, it would provide a venue for dealing with violators of an international agreement reached on small arms. Such violators would not necessarily include only those who use small arms in a prohibited manner, but also the suppliers who provide the weapons and who therefore would be considered accomplices to the crimes.