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**Submission to the Special Rapporteur on**

**violence against women, its causes and consequences**

**Report on femicide[[1]](#footnote-1)**

Femicide is the most heinous manifestation of patriarchy and violent masculinities. The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) continues to support the Special Rapporteur’s efforts towards prevention of femicides, including through calls on states to establish a “femicide watch” and/or observatories. WILPF stresses that femicide watches should gather data on the correlation between widespread possession of firearms and femicide rates, since such data are essential for devising effective prevention policies.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In many countries, legal firearms are the most commonly used weapons in domestic homicides**.** While firearms are more often used to threaten a woman than to actually kill her, when a woman is murdered in an intimate partner homicide, a history of violence often precedes this crime.[[3]](#footnote-3) Domestic homicides are the only category of homicides for which women outnumber men as victims.[[4]](#footnote-4) The presence of guns in a household will increase by five times the likelihood of turning spousal violence into murder.[[5]](#footnote-5)

In countries with low rates of women’s homicide, most killings of women occur in the home, and intimate partners account for the majority of perpetrators.[[6]](#footnote-6) Moreover, fatal violence perpetrated with firearms disproportionately affects transgender women of colour.

In its General Recommendation 35 on Gender-based violence, the CEDAW Committee observed that firearms heighten women’s risk of exposure to serious forms of gender-based violence and recommended that measures be taken to address “factors that heighten women’s risk of exposure to serious forms of gender-based violence, such as the accessibility and availability of firearms, including their exportation.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

WILPF long has recognised that the possession of weapons symbolises power that stems from a particular and dominant understanding and performance of masculinity. It is based upon gender norms in which ideas like strength, courage, and protection are equated with violence.[[8]](#footnote-8) In his May 2018 Agenda for Disarmament, UN Secretary-General António Guterres also recognised that, “concerns relating to arms have clear gender dimensions. The ownership and use of arms is closely linked to specific expressions of masculinity related to control, power, domination and strength.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

Dominant gender norms have distinct impacts on women, and girls, men and boys and non-binary people. Different groups, distinguished by age, sex, gender identity, sexuality, ethnicity, ability, religion, and other factors, therefore experience the impact of firearms differently.Men and boys are systematically exposed to violence as a direct result of dominant gender constructs.[[10]](#footnote-10) Women, however, are more frequently the victims of gender-based violence facilitated by small arms. The proliferation of small arms is correlated with an increase in gendered inequality and a generalised culture of violence, against women in particular, as well as against LGBTQIA people.[[11]](#footnote-11) While arms themselves may not always be directly implicated in acts of gender-based violence, including femicides, they tend to have a negative impact on women’s equality and bargaining power within the household, their mobility, and their political participation.[[12]](#footnote-12) Widespread possession and use of weapons tends to prevent women from fully participating in public and political life, and hinders their access to and use of resources, business, and employment opportunities. [[13]](#footnote-13) In many situations, when men are killed or injured, women must take on new or additional roles as income providers, often leading to impoverishment, exploitation and discrimination.”[[14]](#footnote-14)

WILPF has elaborated these and other concerns in a 2019 submission to OHCHR for a report to the Human Rights Council (HRC) on “civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms on civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights,” which includes a specific section on femicides.[[15]](#footnote-15)A copy of that WILPF submission to OHCHR is provided as Annex I.

In June 2020, the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, which works under the mandate given to it by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), reported that “key measures to halt the spread of Coronavirus — such as lockdown, restriction of movement and social isolation — have left many women more vulnerable to violence.” [[16]](#footnote-16) It further noted that “The presence of an abusive partner at home often makes it difficult, sometimes impossible, for women to report violence or seek help. This suggests that the increase in violence against women and girls is likely much higher than the official numbers show. There is another threat that exacerbates the situation further, and which often goes overlooked: the presence of a firearm at home.” [[17]](#footnote-17) It indicated that “Violence against women is the consequence of gender inequalities and power imbalances. Firearms are instruments of power and control. In the context of violence against women, they provide an ultimate tool for abusers to assert full control and maintain power over a woman – which is the goal of domestic violence. Firearms can be argued to ‘increase power imbalances and reinforce social hierarchies which give men dominance over women.’ Firearms can be used or perceived as a means of threat, but rarely end up in official statistics. Data that we’ve collected,[[18]](#footnote-18) in cooperation with small arms and light weapons commissions, reveals that homicide committed by a family member is the most common form of femicide in South East Europe.”[[19]](#footnote-19)

The Annual Report of the *Observatorio de Femicidios de la Defensoría del Pueblo de la Nación* (Femicide Observatory of the National Ombudsman’s Office) of Argentina, for the period 1 January – 31 December 2020, indicated that use of firearms was among the most common methods used in femicides and recommended, *inter alia*, measures to strengthen the licensing system.[[20]](#footnote-20)

The Colombian section of WILPF (LIMPAL) has brought to the attention of human rights mechanisms the link between femicides and increase in possession of firearms among the population. For example, it did so in a 2019 submission to OHCHR for the abovementioned report on firearms (see Annex II to the present submission) as well as in a report to the CEDAW Committee.[[21]](#footnote-21)

In its submission to OHCHR, LIMPAL referred to statistics from the *‘Red Feminista Antimilitarsta’* (Anti-militarist and feminist network) which, through its *Observatorio Feminicidios Colombia* (Femicide Observatory Colombia), publishes monthly reports with disaggregated data on femicides in Colombia. A report from October 2018 stated that of the 62 cases of femicide registered throughout the Colombian territory, 29 (i.e. 49 percent of all cases) were committed by using a firearm, thus constituting the main method of femicide.[[22]](#footnote-22) In the context of the COVID19 pandemic, there has been an exponential increase in femicides in the country. The *Observatorio Feminicidios Colombia* has reported that 630 cases of femicides were registered in the country in 2020; of those more than half, i.e. 348, were committed with a firearm.[[23]](#footnote-23)

In a recent submission on Italy to the CEDAW Committee’s pre-sessional working group, WILPF illustrated the need for regulation of firearms given their documented impact on violence against women, especially femicides. We elaborated on why the data published by the Ministry of Interior (*Viminale)*, which collects administrative data on homicides, are insufficient and not fully disaggregated. For example, reports from the Ministry of Interior, including the annual report on femicides, do not indicate the weapons or other instruments used in the killings. Moreover, both the National Strategic Plan on male violence against women and NAPs on Women, Peace and Security, including the most recently adopted one,[[24]](#footnote-24) pay no attention to the correlation between firearms and femicides and other forms of violence against women. In our submission to the Committee we also recalled that Italy regrettably did not support a 2019 UPR recommendation to consider revising the framework regulating the control of firearms given the correlation between their use and femicides.[[25]](#footnote-25) In its explanation, the government stated that firearms were used “only in 18% of the cases” of femicides during 2019. In providing that reply, the government used data only from some of the months of 2019 and glossed over the fact that in 2018 the rate of femicides committed with firearms was a troubling 38%. An extract from WILPF submission on Italy to the CEDAW Committee, which includes some detailed statistics on femicides, is sent as Annex III to the present submission to the Special Rapporteur.

# Annexes

* **Annex I:** Submission from the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for the report civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms on civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights (date of the submission: 19 February 2019);
* **Annex II:** Submission from the national section of Colombia of WILPF (LIMPAL) to the OHCHR for the report on civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms on civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights (date of the submission: 19 February 2019);
* **Annex III:** Extract from WILPF Submission to the CEDAW Committee, 80th (virtual) pre-sessional Working Group (1-5 March 2021), List of issues prior to reporting (LOIPR) for Italy.

1. Submission made in response to the Special Rapporteur’s Call for inputs - Report on femicide, available at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/SRWomen/Pages/CFI-taking-stock-femicide.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This is something that WILPF already suggested in 2016, in a joint statement to the Human Rights Council delivered on behalf of 27 CSOs. See WILPF Statement on Weapons, Gender-Based Violence, and Women Human Rights Defenders, available at: <https://www.wilpf.org/wilpf_statements/wilpf-statement-on-weapons-gender-based-violence-and-women-human-rights-defenders/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Chapter 2: Too close to home – Everyday dangers: Guns and Intimate Partner Violence’, in *Everyday Dangers*, Small Arms Survey, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Cambridge University Press, 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. ‘Domestic Violence and Small Arms, Center for Women’s Global Leadership and IANSA Women’s Network, https://16dayscwgl.rutgers.edu/downloads/2012-campaign-docs/441-domestic-violence-small-arms-pdf/file [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. D. Wiebe, ‘Homicide and Suicide Risks Associated with Firearms in the Home: A National Case-Control Study’, *Annals of Emergency Medicine* 41(6), June 2003. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. ‘Chapter Three: Lethal Violence against Women and Girls’, Global Burden of Armed Violence 2015, http://www.genevadeclaration.org/fileadmin/docs/GBAV3/GBAV3\_Ch3\_pp87-120.pdf, [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. General recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, CEDAW/C/GC/35, 14 July 2017, paragraph 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ray Acheson, Presentation on gender norms and gun violence, Reaching Critical Will of WILPF, June 2018: http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/news/latest-news/12587-presentation-on-gender-norms-and-gun-violence. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. UN Secretary-General António Guterres, ‘Securing Our Common Future – An Agenda for Disarmament’, *Office for Disarmament Affairs*, 2018, page 39, https://front.un-arm.org/documents/SG+disarmament+agenda\_1.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. ‘Disarm Domestic Violence’, *WILPF*, 2011, http://www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/Resources/NGO/disarm\_domestic\_violence\_conference\_report\_poster\_2011\_-\_web.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Submission from the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the impact of arms transfers on human rights, 3 February 2017, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/RuleOfLaw/ArmsTransfers/WomensInternationalLeaguePeaceAndFreedom.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Rebecca Gerome, ‘Preventing gender-based violence through arms control: Tools and guidelines to implement the Arms Trade Treaty and UN Programme of Action’, *WILPF*, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See, for example, ‘Feminism at the Frontline: Addressing Women’s Multidimensional Insecurity in Yemen and Libya’, WILPF, May 2017, https://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/LIBYA-YEMEN-WEB.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. UN Secretary-General António Guterres, ‘Securing Our Common Future – An Agenda for Disarmament’, *Office for Disarmament Affairs*, 2018, https://front.un-arm.org/documents/SG+disarmament+agenda\_1.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. <https://www.wilpf.org/wilpf_statements/submission-to-a-report-on-the-impact-of-firearms-on-human-rights/> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. “The hidden pandemic: Firearms and intimate partner violence killing women,” Dragan Bozanic

Gender and research project officer, UNDP, SEESAC, available at <https://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/rbec/en/home/blog/2020/hidden-pandemic-firearms-killing-women.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. <https://www.seesac.org/f/docs/Gender-and-SALW/Misuse-of-firearms-in-SEE_ENG_WEB_FINAL_1.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. “The hidden pandemic: Firearms and intimate partner violence killing women,” Dragan Bozanic

Gender and research project officer, UNDP, SEESAC [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. “Informe Anual del Observatorio de Femicidios de la Defensoría del Pueblo de la Nación, elaborado por el Área Promoción de Derechos Humanos y Comunicación,

01 de enero al 31 de diciembre de 2020” available at: <http://www.dpn.gob.ar/documentos/Observatorio_Femicidios_-_Informe_Final_2020.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/COLOMBIA\_WILPF\_report\_CEDAW\_JAN2019.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid., page 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. See, *Resumen Anual, Colombia, 2020, Feminicidios en Colombia de enero a 31 diciembre de 2020,* available at <http://www.observatoriofeminicidioscolombia.org/attachments/article/451/Feminicidios%20en%20colombia%202020.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. ITALY’S IV PLAN OF ACTION ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY (2020 – 2024), IN ACCORDANCE WITH UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1325 (2000), adopted on 10 December 2020, available at: <https://cidu.esteri.it/comitatodirittiumani/resource/doc/2021/01/plan_of_action_1325_2020-2024.pdf>

While the NAP recalls that the importance of addressing the root causes of violence and refers to the objective to “*promote* the direct, formal and meaningful participation of women and youth in peace processes and in all decision-making processes related to (…) disarmament (…),” it is silent on any commitments towards addressing the impact of arms, such that linked to Italy’s arms transfers. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Recommendation 148.135 Consider revising the framework regulating the control of firearms, given the correlation between their use and femicides (Peru), Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic

Review Italy, A/HRC/43/4, 27 December 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)