Nyonsuabeleah Kollue for IANSA (International Action Network on Small Arms)

Thank you. I’m speaking on behalf of the International Action Network on Small Arms.

IANSA is the global movement against gun violence, a network of hundreds of organizations around the world working against the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons.

Since the first conference in 2001, IANSA has coordinated civil society participation in the UN small arms process.

The latest meeting of that process was in June this year, the 6th Biennial Meeting of States, or BMS6.

The meeting was a success. States committed to increasing the engagement of women in small arms control, and recognized the importance of small arms control for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Many states supported the proposal by Ghana for ammunition to be explicitly included in the scope of the Program of Action on small arms, or POA.

And there is no doubt that in the 15 years of the POA, controls over small arms and light weapons have improved a great deal.

Despite these successes there is still much to be done.

The overwhelming focus of the outcome document of BMS6 is still on armed conflict – or war.

Whereas the larger problem is the utilization of small arms in situations of pervasive armed violence – that is countries with high rates of crime.

I am speaking to you as a survivor of both scenarios – situations of war and of pervasive crime.

I was born in a refugee camp, in Nigeria, after my parents fled the war in Liberia.

My parents were middle class professionals in the capital, Monrovia. They fled for their lives from a war that killed or maimed hundreds of thousands of people, used 15,000 child soldiers and created approximately 200,000 refugees.

I am alive today because Nigeria opened its borders to people like my parents, and like so many other people who are seeking asylum around the world today. I’ll take this opportunity to say THANK YOU to Nigeria.
The Liberian civil war was started by Charles Taylor and a group of about 100 rebels, armed with AK47s.

This small number of men with guns created a conflict that not only devastated Liberia, but spilled over to destabilize two other countries.

For our family, escaping the conflict did not mean escaping armed violence.

As a child, I quickly learnt about the daily threats of gun crime in a large African city.

I was afraid to go to school, and was always on the alert for signs of danger.

If I walked past the bus terminal and saw it was empty, I knew I must return home because a riot was about to break out.

I remember hearing gunshots from our neighbor’s home during a robbery attack. My mother pushing us to the floor to avoid flying bullets.

This was NOT a country at war. This was so called “peace time”, the daily reality for many children in societies where the rule of law is strained, and guns are easily available.

In 2018, member states have the opportunity to strengthen the POA.

Between now and the review conference, IANSA members will be lobbying their governments to push for changes to make the POA more effective and relevant to the small arms problem.

These changes would include the inclusion of ammunition in the POA, as well as measures to address the problem of pervasive armed violence.

This means reducing general access to guns.

It is also time for the global community to address the uncomfortable subject of actually reducing the global stockpile of small arms and light weapons – rather than just managing it.

As we approach the 3rd POA Review Conference, IANSA hopes Member states will give higher priority to destruction of weapons, and also to actually reducing production.

Thank you