

## **DESTRUCTION OF SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS AT MAGAMAGA, JINJA IN UGANDA.**

On Wednesday, the 6<sup>th</sup> of July 2011, EASSI joined officials of the Uganda National Focal Point Network on Small Arms and the Uganda Action Network on Small Arms in a fire arms destruction event. The activity took place in Jinja district at the Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF) Army Depot at the Magamaga Destruction Site. The commitment pursued by the UPDF to destroy the arms was joined by the East African Community Small Arms Project (EAC), Regional Center for Small Arms (RECSA), co-coordinator National Focal Point (NFP), the Resident District Commissioner, Mayuge Lt. Martha Asiimwe, the United Nations Development Programme and the Japan government.

The arms that were destroyed were mainly obtained from the Karamojong in a project of the UPDF called Phase 1 of the Voluntary Disarmament. All the arms that were gathered are considered obsolete. Many of them are recovered arms and ammunitions got from cattle rustlers and or those that were left in armories or battle grounds. At Magamaga, 31,272 assorted rifles were destroyed. This has added to the 2000 guns that were destroyed in Nsambya on the 26<sup>th</sup> September, 2000 and 3309 guns that were destroyed at Munyonyo on the 10<sup>th</sup> October 2009. The recently destroyed explosives in Moroto bring the total number of fueled and burnt fire arms to 98,386 in Uganda.

Ugandan citizens are afflicted by the proliferation of illicit small arms which have been used to displace people from their homes and forced them to be refugees. They are also used in acts of rape, night and highway robberies causing not only insecurity and a threat to people's lives but also leading to fatalities.

The National Action Plan on small arms management brings together the government and Civil Society Organizations to control the management of existing stocks of small arms , reduce the small arms already in circulation and also prevent the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The destruction of fire arms builds the public's confidence that the country is a safe place to be and this shows that the country is moving towards development because peace facilitates development.

Speaking at this function, the National Focal Point (NFP) coordinator, Mr. Ahmed Wafuba in coordination with Uganda Action Network on Small Arms (UANSA) comprises of not only the security team but also the police, UPDF, immigration, foreign affairs and Civil Society Organizations. The NFP endeavors to combat, control and curtail easy access of small arms. The EAC has provided financial support to the NFP to mark, trace and safely store the arms. The weapons collected, seized and considered surplus or excessive must be destroyed immediately to ensure safety of the public. The destruction of these arms is aimed at ensuring that they are not illegally used or recycled into the neighboring society. This greatly prevents illegal arms from being used in acts of violence.

EASSI as a civil society organization advocating for the increase of women's participation in peace management and reconstruction efforts, and strengthening linkages with national and regional organizations in peace and management, it was our pleasure to take part in this action against violence and to see to it that the weapons that have been gathered are destroyed immediately. EASSI is also vigorously advocating for a gender dimension to small arms management. In this endeavor it is building the capacities of NFP's in the region on gender and small arms.

In any country, arms imported and exported for the police or the armed forces should be known to the public accordingly to prevent hoarding or illegal possession of fire arms. These arms are a liability to the government and if used illegally, they are an asset to criminals who in the end wreck people's families and homes. Arms cause a threat to peace, security, stability and economic development. Therefore, the safe storage of ammunitions and the act of destroying arms effectively places the issue of peace and development at the forefront of our country, Uganda.

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