In recent years, Burkina Faso has been experiencing large-scale turmoil because of terrorism and the illicit proliferation and circulation of small arms and light weapons (SALW). Some initiatives have been implemented to address the issue. However, peace and security are under threat, and the potential for increased gender-based violence requires a suitable response.

The scourge of small arms and light weapons

Small arms and light weapons is the last category of conventional arms under the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). In Burkina Faso, the illicit proliferation and circulation of these weapons is steadily growing, as is political unrest, fragmentation of the social fabric, insecurity, and the rise of violent extremism and terrorism. Among other factors, non-compliance with regulations, flawed monitoring systems and structures, permeability of borders all enable the illicit proliferation and circulation of SALW, thus impeding efforts aimed at promoting economic and social development. Investigations and analyses have shown that the causes of illicit proliferation and circulation of SALW are both internal and external.

Psychological gender-based violence or the masculinity of armed violence

Violence is the use of physical or psychological strength to coerce, dominate, cause harm or death; it concerns all of humankind. It is expressed in the context of human relations and interactions or in wars and conflicts between countries or opposing factions. Violence and its related practices, particularly those targeting women, represent a major and ongoing concern for humanity as a whole.

Escalating terrorism and SALW

In Burkina Faso, murderous and repeated attacks are tangible manifestations of terrorism and its substantial impact on the humanitarian and educational sectors. Victims are usually male. At this point in time, only collateral damages affect women and children.

Cross-analyses seem to indicate that terrorists intend to undermine morale among defence and security forces (DSF), weaken their resolve, and sow psychosis and trauma within populations for the purpose of destabilising the country. Authorities have initiated response operations, prevention and anticipation strategies, including a focus on combating violent extremism.

The link between terrorism and the illicit proliferation and circulation of SALW is obvious and these weapons are available, accessible and are found in all of the theaters where terrorist attacks are perpetrated.

Improvised explosive devices amid terrorists and artisanal gold miners

In their ever-changing operating modes, terrorists introduced improvised explosive devices (IEDs) into
Burkina Faso, previously unknown to the country. These explosive weapons are mainly used against DSF convoys, which after being ambushed incur substantial material damages and loss of human lives, where victims are generally male.

Another recent terrorist practice consists in using corpses rigged with IEDs that explode as soon as they are manipulated. Until now, bodies and victims used for these operations have been male.

As for artisanal gold miners, explosives are intended for mineral extraction. However, control measures of these practices still escape competent state authorities. As a result, the products acquired are often fraudulently stocked without precautions, leading in turn to harmful accidental explosions, without specifically targeting a gender. Sometimes, these explosives fall into the hands of terrorists, thus corroborating the existence of a trafficking network.

**Youth, as actors and victims of armed violence**

Young people are often victims of SALW. Young men are also users of SALW, particularly those who are seeking authority, dignity or easy financial gain and social prestige. Their numbers are increasing as enrollees in terrorist networks or gangs who engage in criminal behaviours.

In part, the connection between young people and weapons can be justified by the influence of media (violent films and games), bad company (alcoholics, drug addicts, highway bandits), growing impoverishment and parents abdicating their role in educating their children. Young people bear considerable responsibility in the insecurity process, without regard to gender.

**The female face of armed violence**

In Burkina Faso, women deal with unfavourable economic, social and legal conjectures. In addition, they fall victim to many forms of violence, a majority of instances stemming from the sociocultural construct that defines status and roles based on gender. Consequently, most violent incidents against women occur behind closed doors. Victims are silenced in the name of prudery or family honour.

Armed violence against women generally takes place in the context of homicides, domestic violence (sexual or spousal abuse at gunpoint, rape, community conflict, etc.) or during armed robberies. It is also of a psychological or economic nature.

**Response aimed at mitigating gender-based violence**

Various forms of violence targeted at women and girls, or violence that impacts women and girls, are central to the concerns underlying all of national, regional and international actions.

**National effort**

Measures are taken and implemented in legal, social and economic terms to ensure the promotion of women’s rights and prevent gender-based violence. Nonetheless, these measures remain insufficient in their design and/or in their implementation. A review of security policies in Burkina Faso is an opportunity for the platform of civil society organisations for the governance of the security sector to actively contribute, alongside authorities, to improving the security environment, while taking into account peoples’ expectations and providing a space for the concept of gender.
**Pan-African and international agendas**

Currently, the issue of all forms of violence is monitored at every level of social, political, economic, interpersonal and inter-family relations, just as Africa is facing significant challenges. In order to promote the mitigation of gender-based violence, the Women, Peace and Security agenda in Africa, under the African Union Commission, needs to be accelerated so that women can make the issue of weapons their own, as they endure significant burdens caused by arms. In addition, there must be progress in the implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 – 1820 and 2242.

The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) has the potential to prevent gender-based violence under Article 7(4), which requires that state parties assess the risks of arms transfers being used to “commit” or “facilitate” such violence. However, its implementation needs to improve. While the interest generated by this topic during the Fifth Conference of States Parties is a welcome development, action needs to follow words. The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom has published resources to guide state parties on the way to proceed and on the links between preventing gender-based violence and legal obligations arising from other international instruments. We are willing to cooperate with states parties to genuinely address gender-based violence.

Intensified promotion of human rights, secure management of state stockpiles and efficient control over civilian weapons are also imperative to improve the security environment and therefore, can together reduce gender-based violence.