

# Survivors

Women  
affected by  
gun violence  
speak out



# Foreword

## About 'Survivors'

A thousand people die every day by gunshot and many more are seriously injured. However, the global gun violence epidemic affects men and women differently. Men are the overwhelming majority of direct victims and perpetrators of gun violence; but women suffer disproportionately given that they are rarely gun purchasers, owners or users. Every year over 30,000 women and girls are killed by guns and millions are traumatised, intimidated, enslaved, robbed and raped at gunpoint.

'Survivors' presents women's experiences of gun violence in their own words. These experiences range from torture in Central Africa to domestic violence in Europe; from crossfire in Asia to grieving the loss of a murdered child in the Americas. Harrowing and at times hopeful, the 16 stories paint a picture of the impact of guns on ordinary women's lives.

Most of the stories take place at home. Unlike men, women are more likely to encounter gun violence in the home than in public places.

Several of the stories call attention to the fact that women are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and intimidation at gunpoint, which is now often used as a deliberate military and political tactic during armed conflict. Even when women are not directly targeted by gun violence, they and their children bear the brunt of its socioeconomic and emotional impacts, for example by becoming impoverished when male relatives are shot. In several stories, women are left to pick up the pieces of lives and societies shattered by gun violence.

Above all, the stories demonstrate that women are not just passive victims of gun violence: they are first and foremost survivors. They are also caregivers, peacemakers and activists for change.

This compilation contains only a sample of the testimonies that have been contributed to the IANSA Women's Network. Many others can be found on our Women's Portal, [www.iansa.org/women](http://www.iansa.org/women). The contributors have shown tremendous courage in surviving their experiences but also in recounting them for this project. Because of continuing trauma and danger, the identity of some contributors cannot be revealed.

These stories underscore the fact that effective solutions to the global gun crisis will require a new, gender-sensitive approach. We must develop policies that reflect the different ways women and men are affected by and respond to guns. We must also ensure that women are fully involved in small arms policy and practice – including reform and enforcement of national gun laws, conflict resolution, peacebuilding and development. The IANSA Women's Network invites readers to help us make these goals a reality.

Rebecca Peters, Director, IANSA

## Ambush in Burundi

CHANTAL MANANI, BURUNDI

IT WAS 10.30 AM ON 23 MAY 2003, when soldiers from the government army fell into an ambush set up by rebel combatants from the National Liberation Front (FLN) while coming back from their regular patrol in the hills surrounding the village of the catholic parish of Mutunba.

Chasing the rebels, the soldiers fired several bullets in the direction where a murder was committed, nearly five kilometres away from our house.

The inhabitants of the village became disoriented and started looking for a safe place to

take refuge. Each family left their home with only their most essential belongings and headed towards the local church, the only place they judged to be safe.

My family and I had just left our house and were heading towards the church when suddenly



two soldiers approached us and demanded that we go back to the house, where they ordered us to lie down.

When I was down on the ground, one of the two soldiers demanded that I come outside with him. I obeyed the order and left the house. The soldiers started shooting under the door to frighten my husband, who remained in the house with my children and some other people they had rounded up from the area.

ONCE I WAS ON MY OWN OUTSIDE, the soldier lead me to a bush behind our toilets and demanded that I lie down and get undressed or he would shoot me and my husband.

With great force, he tore off my underwear and gave me a kick with his foot. I fell naked to the ground. A few seconds later he was on top of me and the act was consummated.

Then the other soldier who had been inside terrorising the others by shooting into the air told his friend that it was his turn. He climbed on top of me and performed the same disgusting act.

It was truly painful and horrible. I was four months pregnant, and I could not breathe properly. When the soldier realised that I had difficulty breathing, he quickly got up and headed off.

A few minutes later, the neighbours picked me up and took me to the parish clinic. In spite of the help of the medical staff, I suffered a miscarriage.

Word of my story spread quickly through the village. Whenever I walked down the street, I knew everyone was talking about me, which made me feel wretched.

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# Africa

## So many lost to guns

MUTESIA LEWARANI, KENYA

MY NAME IS MUTESIA LEWARANI. I am a 40 year-old widow. I come from the Baragoi division of the Samburu district in Kenya. The Samburu district is in the Rift Valley province where the marginalised pastoral and semi-pastoral communities of Kenya live. Cattle rustling (livestock theft) is a tradition and a way of life for these communities. Lately firearms are increasingly and indiscriminately used in the process.

Competing with neighbouring communities over scarce resources such as pastures and water for our livestock has made us insecure. In my community, guns have become tools for acquiring and protecting wealth. Small arms are so rife that an AK47 rifle is often part of a bride price.

Cattle rustling has always been a feature of our lives, but it has escalated over the years due to the presence of guns in our community. Before I got married, Turkana warriors raided my village constantly. During one of these raids, all of my father's livestock was taken away. My father was away during the attack, and so my two mothers raised the alarm. I watched as the armed warriors raped one of my mothers in our shared sleeping quarters. Then both were brutally shot dead. Although it happened several years back, the incident is still very vivid in my mind.

A FEW YEARS LATER, I got married. I was happy to have my own home, healthy children and livestock. However, peace remained elusive. My happiness was cut short by a raid from Pokot warriors on my homestead. My husband's family lost 100 cattle and 30 goats and sheep in a daylight raid that lasted less than 45 minutes. My husbands' two brothers who lived with us

were shot dead in the process.

Now living in fear, we abandoned our home and sought refuge in a camp in Maralal, where displaced people like us were hosted. During this time my husband's health greatly deteriorated. He died, leaving me the sole breadwinner of the family with no property and nothing to call a home. I decided to leave the camp and return to my marital home in Marti. By now, the government had stepped up security and all of us in the villages felt safer. Living with my in-laws, I struggled to fend for my children.

Two of my children were among the children from the village who were shot dead by armed warriors as they looked after relatives' livestock. Today as I speak, I am looking after my son's expectant wife at the Maralal hospital. She is recovering from gunshot wounds she suffered

I have lost count of the siblings I have lost to guns. I believe that if the government provides my community with more security, a lot of people will surrender their illegal firearms.

during a raid in early April 2006. I pray that God saves her life as she is due to have a baby in one month's time.

I have lost count of the siblings I have lost to guns. I believe that if the government provides my community with more security, a lot of people will surrender their illegal firearms. There are also very sophisticated weapons being smuggled across the borders. If security is tightened, we will have fewer guns coming in.

# Africa

## Trying to rebuild a life

KAVIRA ZAWADI, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

ONE NIGHT IN MAY 2004 my husband and I were sleeping in our house when we suddenly heard some people asking us to open the door. It was around 3 am. Fearing an attack, we refused. At that time, insecurity ruled in our town.

After around ten minutes, gunmen forced themselves through our flimsy door. They bolted into our bedroom and warned us not to scream or put on the light. Their torches were the only light there was, but I could discern that there were six men in military uniforms holding guns. The men told my husband that if he didn't give them money they would rape me and kill him. Out of fear, my husband gave them all of the money we had in the house – around \$300 – which we had been saving to buy some land.

The cash was not enough to satisfy them, and one of them decided to rape me after tying up my husband. When I screamed, he started shooting his gun in the air to deter anyone from the surrounding houses to come and rescue us. I viciously bit the gunman who was trying to rape me. Angered by my action, he fired four bullets into my chest and another one into my forearm. I was presumed dead since my body lay limp

My arm injury and body scars made me repellent to my husband. He declared I was an unfit wife since I could not perform household chores or have children.

on the floor. The men quickly left our house, although not before one fired a bullet into my husband's knee while the others shot into the air.

I WAS TAKEN TO HOSPITAL, where it was discovered that my fallopian tube was damaged and I had to have my tubes tied.

My arm injury and body scars made me repellent to my husband. He declared I was an unfit wife since I could not perform household chores or have children.

Rejected by my husband, I am currently living without any livelihood under my parents' roof with my elderly mother. My only consolation is a nongovernmental organisation called CREDD which provides legal assistance to victims of sexual violence. The staff are helping me to convince my husband to take me back into our home.



# Africa

## Abduction, fear and pain

JANET AOL, UGANDA

I WAS ABDUCTED BY REBELS from the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda when I was seven and forced to fight as a child soldier for 12 years.

When the rebels attacked my village they shot many villagers in front of me and took me away from my parents. The rebels took me and some other children through the bush to the LRA headquarters in southern Sudan by binding us with rope. It was a long way, but we had to walk there without saying anything or they threatened us with a gun. I saw several children killed on the way to Sudan just because they tried to escape. Although 15 years have passed, I cannot forget their cries or their faces in death.

We abductees were forced to do anything the rebels needed or wanted, such as cooking, drawing water, carrying weapons and heavy luggage for long distances without food or water. The most painful experience that we girls suffered was rape by the commander and forced marriage to adult soldiers. Some girls were forced to enter into shotgun marriages with men who were more than ten years older. We had to obey because there was no way to

resist men who were armed with guns. Many girls and women who refused or tried to escape were killed or cut with a knife as punishment. I do not remember how many times over

those 12 years in the bush I prayed to go back to my home and parents.

I married one of the LRA soldiers and gave birth to a baby in the bush when I was only 13. A second child was born when I was 18. I was relatively lucky because the man who became my husband was not an old commander but an abducted child like me from the same village.

I was forced to use a gun and kill people... I do not know how many people were injured or killed by my bullets.



He was a kindly man who always took care of me and my babies.

It was not easy for me to live in the bush. Whenever the government force, the UPDF, attacked girls with babies, we could not protect ourselves. Helicopter attacks did not distinguish between children, women and men. Along with men, many girls and their babies were killed or injured during crossfire. I saw so many children shot and killed. I myself was shot in the hand and still feel pain even now. I did my best to try to escape in order to defend my children, but when they began to cry, the adult soldiers sometimes got angry and beat me.

I WAS FORCED TO USE a gun and kill people. I was trained how to use a gun in Sudan and how to fight the UPDF in the bush. Then one day I was given a gun and ordered to kill enemies. I could not stop trembling when I fired a gun for the first time.

I do not know how many people were injured or killed by my bullets. I do not know whether I killed civilians. Once crossfire broke out near a village there was almost no way for me to distinguish between civilians and the army. I have had nightmares ever since. But I had no choice but to fight until I was rescued by the UPDF at the age of 19.

I continue to suffer from gun violence even ▶

## Left alone to die slowly

CATHERINE, SIERRA LEONE

ON 7 JANUARY 1999, early in the morning while I was still in bed, I heard gunshots in our compound. I quickly woke up my husband and children and we hid in the wardrobe. We were so scared. We didn't know what to do.

Suddenly rebels banged on the door and forced it open. They demanded money from my husband and he gave them 50,000 leones, which was all we had in the house. They asked for more money but there was nothing left. One of the rebels cocked his gun and threatened to blow my husband's head off if he refused to give them more money.

'You people thought we had gone, but we are here today to kill all of you bloody civilians who refused to support us!' the rebel said. 'If you have no money then let me send you to eternal rest!'

Then he shot my husband in the chest, who cried out, 'You have killed me!'

I could not bear it so I opened the door of the wardrobe, shouting, 'You killed my husband!'

Then they grabbed hold of me and all six soldiers raped me one after the other in front

of my kids. After the first rape, they asked everybody else in the house to come outside. One of the rebels ordered me to march forward at gunpoint, and suddenly I saw smoke. He started laughing at me and told me that our house was now on fire.

THE SIX MEN CONTINUED to torture me. They tied my legs and hands apart on a tree and kicked me in the stomach. They raped me again, one after the other, and invited other combatants to join them.

Whenever I cried and begged them, they insulted me and intensified their assault. Between 15 and 20 men raped me that night.

I was so helpless, I kept on bleeding. Eventually I felt something come out between my legs. I later learnt that it was my womb. I was left alone to die slowly for more than a month.

Whenever I cried and begged them, they insulted me and intensified their assault.

◀ after escaping the LRA. When I came back home I found that my father had been killed by rebels several years earlier. I met my husband at a rehabilitation centre. He had been rescued a year before me, but he was blinded by a bullet which hit him during a battle with the UPDF. When I met him he said, "I could not even see our native village, and I found my parents had died while I was in bush for 11 years. Now I cannot even see your face. I feel that a new darkness laps over me."

Some neighbours said to us, "You are killers! You killed our relatives! Why did you come back?" But we just want to live in peace again like before we were abducted.

I sometimes imagine what my life would have been like if nobody had ever brought

weapons even a child can handle to our land or manufactured them anywhere in the world. I could have spent my teen years with my beloved family and friends in peace and happiness. Although it is too late, I hope that people who make such weapons and transfer them to our land realise the suffering they cause us in Uganda. More than 20,000 children in my country were abducted and forced to fight as soldiers like me.

For the past month I have been learning a vocation. I want to change my future even though it is difficult. I believe people can make a difference. My husband is studying small-scale business. Although he is blind, he is committed to supporting our family. My hope is that in the future our children will be able to live in peace, free from fear of gun violence.

# Africa

## Trying to get help

FADY, MALI

I WAS THE VICTIM OF A BARBARIC ACT in 1993 on my way back from Gossy with my husband, Agaly Haidara, during the Touareg rebellion. We were attacked by a gang of armed bandits while riding in a cab 50km from Gao in Intahaka.

Suddenly we heard the driver shout, 'It is them, the rebels!' I then realised my husband was leaning on me. He had just been shot in the chest. The gunmen shot at us because they thought our driver failed to stop at their warning. The bullet went through my husband's chest and lodged itself in my right thigh, where it still lies to this day. There was no one to call for help. Later, we were rescued by a parliamentarian, Abdoul Madjid, and some soldiers.

When I realised that I was bleeding from my thigh I remembered that my father had taught me to use a tourniquet in such a situation. I took off my headscarf and tied it around my thigh in order to stop the bleeding. I held my dead husband until we got to Gossy.

The doctor nearly fainted when he saw us. He was so shocked that other people had to help stop my bleeding. The cab was drenched with our blood.

I HAD TO HIRE A CAR TO TRANSFER my husband's body to Gao, where another doctor told me that there was nothing seriously wrong with me. However, I was sure I had a foreign

object in my body. I knew it and felt it.

My parents helped me travel to Bamako for a more advanced check-up and x-ray which confirmed the presence of a bullet in my right thigh. But I didn't receive any particular care or compensation despite the fact that I was entitled to it.

Now I want to get the bullet out of my body. I feel it when I sleep for a long time on the right side of my body or when it is cold. I want to be freed from this burden in my body, but I am poor and I need help.

Later one of my relatives, Souleymane Idrissa, the former mayor of Gao, helped me to travel to Cotonou where I received some treatment, but I have not gone back as I am too scared.

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## Hoping for peace

ANONYMOUS, PAKISTAN

AT THE TIME OF MY BIRTH, my father and uncles prepared to fire their guns into the air in celebration. They were expecting a son. When I was born, they were very disappointed. Nobody in the family was ready to welcome a girl child.

The guns that remained silent at my birth would later wreak havoc on my life.

I was raised in a culture where guns and gun violence were routine. My male family members always carried weapons, and I was afraid of them. Like most girls in my village, I was deprived of an education. My mother told me not to complain because my brothers or fathers would kill me if they found out I wanted to be educated. 'Don't do this or that, otherwise your father will kill you' was the most common sentence I ever heard from my mother until I reached puberty.

When I was very young, I married a man who loved nothing more than guns and weapons. A bloody 35-year dispute was raging between my husband and his cousins over a very minor issue (my husband's cousin had thrown water on my husband during prayers some 35 years earlier). Over the years, this trivial feud claimed the lives of 98 people, including my husband, my son, my two brothers-in-law and many others.

Although I had long been frightened by even the sight of weapons, the family dispute forced me to learn how to fire, load and clean guns. My husband taught me how to fire a Kalashnikov, 30 and 32-bore pistol and a 12-bore shotgun. I hated every second of it, but he would punish me severely if I admitted this. He said that if I wanted to remain his wife and alive, I had to learn how to use these weapons.

My entire life has been filled with bloodshed, tears and sorrow. Not a single year has passed without lives being taken. In 2000, my husband

and eldest son went out for morning prayers and they never came back. They were shot dead on their way home from the village mosque.

In 2005, my 16 year-old son Nasir was shot by an unidentified gunman in the snooker club he ran. He was shot three times in the chest and his spinal cord was badly injured. He is now paralysed.

My husband used to buy weapons by selling my jewellery and his property. After he died, I sold his weapons to buy coffins and medicine for my disabled son. Today the only source of income for my seven-member family is my 15 year-old son, who earns less than \$100 per month working in a motor mechanic workshop.

I WONDER WHO TO BLAME for my misery. I wish I could destroy all the weapons from all over the world, weapons which only kill, take fathers from their children, sons from their mothers, brothers from their sisters, and husbands from their wives. I have lost almost all I have to gun violence, and I feel very worried for the children of my village, city, province, country and world.

I am alarmed to see that my government has failed to effectively address the problem of gun violence. Politicians do not care about the children of our nation.

I hope that a day will come when no daughter, bride, wife or mother will suffer my fate, a time when people on earth will be able to live in peace without violence and without weapons. I hope for a time when people and governments will unite to eliminate life-threatening weapons from God's world.



After he died, I sold his weapons to buy coffins and medicine for my disabled son.

# Asia

## Four years of rape

ANONYMOUS, INDIA

I WAS A 13 YEAR-OLD girl and the youngest child in my family. My parents were teachers. In our town a play on the life of Lord Rama called Ramleela used to play for two weeks every year. Families would watch the play in a venue called Ramleela Maidan. I was a regular visitor. As young teenagers, we would get permission from a friend's parents for all of us to go.

That evening, I was with my boyfriend and we had just met one of our friends. It was around 9.30 or 10 pm. The three of us were passing through a dark lane (in winter the lanes are empty and often unlit), when suddenly three men around 20 or 25 years of age appeared from nowhere and scolded my friend and me by asking, 'Where are you two going in the dark?' They said they were police in civilian dress. They had revolvers. They told my friend to go home immediately or return to the theatre. My boyfriend disappeared after they pointed a gun at him.

They asked me where I lived and I told them my address. I was very scared as they said they would tell my parents that I was walking around with a boy in the dark instead of attending the play like I was supposed to be. In India in those days it was regarded as very bad for girls to roam freely with boys. My parents were very strict, especially my father, who was short-tempered.

The men ordered me to follow them so they could take me home. We were marching together, the three of them and me. Suddenly they turned into a road that led to an abandoned area of our city. I immediately said, 'This is not the way to my home!' They held the gun to my temple and told me to follow them silently or else they would shoot me. I was sure I had been kidnapped. I was a small girl and I started crying. Either I face what comes next or I die.

At gunpoint, the three men took me to an abandoned plot surrounded by walls. One of them told me he was totally in love with me and that

he would kill my parents unless I reciprocated. He said nothing would happen to him as he was a policeman. He demanded that I respect his love and said that he could wait no longer.

I thought I had to give in or else I would be killed by the gun. I did not want to die. My mum wanted me to study hard and become a lawyer. She adored me because I was the most intelligent of her children, the youngest with a promising future.

So I told him I loved him too. He demanded that since I loved him, and as proof of my loyalty, I must allow him to have me physically. He said

we would marry later. I was shocked and started crying loudly. His friends helped him to rape me at gunpoint 'as a proof of my loyalty towards him.' Then they took me home.

After that he would follow me to my school almost daily and would wait for hours near the school so that he could follow me and force me to have physical contact on demand, always at gunpoint. He and his friends pressured me to bring them one of my friends so they could rape her too.

WHENEVER I RESISTED HE WOULD first insist that he loved me and that he wanted to marry me. If I resisted further he would point his gun at me. If, in a fit of rage, I screamed that he must kill me, then he would point the gun on himself and say he might as well kill himself too. My boyfriend was warned never to see me again.

This went on for the next four years. Eventually my mum guessed that something was troubling me. I told her that some boys were bothering me on the way to school but did not mention a word about the gun or the repeated rape because my father's anger would be worse than anything else. I suffered repeated vaginal infections at that young age, but I dared not seek any treatment. ▶

With all my soul  
I am against guns.

## Living in constant fear

GITA K.C., NEPAL

I AM DISABLED NOW. I cannot move without assistance. I am always afraid when I see the place where I was shot by the security forces. I do not have the courage to see that place again. I am also always afraid when I see army uniforms and weapons, on the street or anywhere. I live in constant fear of guns and violence.

I was an 18 year-old university student at the time. It was 1 February 2005, the day the King had taken all executive power from the political parties. Party leaders had been arrested early in the morning. Some students from Pokhara were coming to participate in a demonstration. In an effort to stop such activities and demonstrations, security forces entered in the Prithbinarayan campus and fired teargas.

By the time I reached the campus, the teargas had seeped everywhere. Some of us students took refuge in a room and were sitting there when suddenly I felt a bullet pierce my left leg. I fell unconscious.

When I woke up, I was in the hospital. A steel rod had been put in my leg in place of bone, which had been completely damaged by the bullet.

I could no longer take my exams and I could

not remember things like I could before.

IN NEPAL, THE STATE USES guns without a good reason, and many people are needlessly injured. The Maoists also use guns for no reason. They shoot people for purely ideological differences.

Recently I have become actively involved in the movement for democracy and this time the people have won. The power of the people is stronger than the power of weapons.

My family is worried for my future now. They fear that I will not be able to lead a normal life, because of my injury and constant fearfulness. Who will marry me? Who will accept me in this situation? A single gunshot has completely destroyed my dreams of higher studies and a normal life. So I now hate guns.

The power of the people is stronger than the power of weapons.



◀ My mum told my father that some boys were teasing me and he quickly took charge of the matter. My assailant was immediately transferred to an unknown place. My infections healed themselves. I never saw that man and his friends again in my life.

My mother died when I was still a student, and I gained admission to university to study education. I got married at the age of 20 to a wonderful person, a lawyer. I was worried that my infections would mean I would never be able to become a mother.

However, I now have a very happy family. My daughter is beautiful, and is a law student herself. My son is a 6th standard student and is very

handsome. I have been an extraordinarily cautious mother. I have instilled good values in my children and have made sure they have never been exposed to anyone who troubles them in any way.

Now I am 38 years old, but the memory of that night is vivid. I had nightmares for many years. All my life I will never forget the face of that man who spoiled my youth.

I feel that if a woman has to face such circumstances in her life she must not lose courage but live life even more boldly. The future always has much better things in store for us.

With all my soul I am against guns.

# Asia

## Home terrorised by guns

KAREN, PHILIPPINES

I WAS BARELY FIVE YEARS old when my father, a field military officer, was assigned to work in Mindanao. Because my mother was also working, she sent my two siblings and me to live with different relatives. We lived apart for the next ten years. My father visited us during each Christmas season but was always in a hurry to leave.

In 2001 my father came back for good. My mother fetched us from our relatives and we all lived together again under one roof. The first few months were awkward but happy. It was as if we were meeting new people and my father tried his best to catch up with us.

Things started to change one day when my father got drunk and came home reeking of alcohol. He grabbed my mother's hair and shouted and cursed at us. When we thought he had finally calmed down, we put him to bed.

The next morning he got up early. We saw him sitting at the dining table where his three pistols lay in bits and pieces. He was cleaning them. Everybody was shocked at the sight.

That afternoon he left the house for a couple of hours. When he came back he was carrying three guns, one in his hand, and two behind his back. We will never forget what happened next. He grabbed my oldest sister and pointed a gun at her head. My mother screamed and begged him not to pull the trigger.

Maybe her screams annoyed him because he pushed my sister to the ground and diverted his attention to my mother. Pointing his gun at her, he kicked her and dragged her to their room where he violently ripped her clothes. My mother submitted to him so he would not touch any of

us. But it wasn't enough. He beat her almost to death while having sex with her. We could hear them from the living room. We knew it was rape. My father did not even take care to close the door. It was like he wanted us to see him abuse our mother.

This went on for five years. For five years we heard our mother's screams. For five years my father always carried a gun with him and pointed it at all of us.

ONE AFTERNOON WE CAME HOME from school to hear my father beating my mother. The scenario had become so normal that we made no noise and carried on with our daily routine. Suddenly we heard three gunshots followed by silence. We were terrified. After a couple of minutes had passed, we heard our mother sobbing. She came out with a gun in her hand and blood dripping from her clothes. She had shot my father in his stomach three times.

For five years we heard our mother's screams. For five years my father always carried a gun with him and pointed it at all of us.

Miraculously, the gunshots did not kill him, but they paralysed half his body.

Today the five of us live in the same house. My mother still works. However, now we all have to take care of my disabled father.

# Americas

## Keeping hope alive

LUCIANA NOVÃES, BRAZIL

MY NAME IS LUCIANA NOVÃES and I am 22 years old. I was a nursing student at Estacio de Sá University in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil until 5 May 2003, when I was hit in the neck by a stray bullet fired from somewhere outside. At the time, I was inside the university, having a snack with a friend on a break between two exams.

I have no memory of being shot. All I recall is waking up at the hospital and being confronted with the horror of what had happened. It was an awful moment. I was just 19 years old at the time. I had just been offered two jobs and was planning to start working in addition to my studies.

Instead, I spent the next year and nine months in hospital. The last six months of this time were spent waiting to be moved to a home more suited to accommodate my many needs.

Doctors explained to me that the bullet had entered the left side of my jaw, destroying a vertebra and lodging itself in my spinal column. Now I move in a wheelchair and a machine makes it possible for me to breathe.

I was told the bullet came from a security guard's gun, but the real story was never uncovered, the culprit never found. There was

a trial, and the University has to pay some compensation, but so far all I received was a house on loan.

The doctors told me I would never speak or eat again. Now I can do both things. I believe I will keep getting better. My aim is to be able to breathe without help. When I do that, I will be able to move around more easily and not be so homebound. Hope should be the last thing to die.

THE ACCIDENT INTERRUPTED all my dreams. I took care of my father after his stroke, and all I wanted was to continue helping him and others who would need my services as a nurse. Instead, now I am the one who needs looking after. My parents care for me around the clock; nurses come to me for twice daily physiotherapy sessions. My sister Jo leaves her three children every day to come and help.

My favourite thing was going to the beach and the gym. Now I read and watch TV from my chair.

But I have faith. The doctors told me I would never speak or eat again. Now I can do both things. I believe I will keep getting better. My aim is to be able to breathe without help. When I do that, I will be able to move around more easily and not be so homebound. Hope should be the last thing to die.



# Americas

## Only one bullet...

MARTA ELSA GHIGLIA DE CANILLAS, ARGENTINA

MY NAME IS MARTA ELSA Ghiglia de Canillas, but since 12 July 2002 I am known simply as Juan Manuel's mother.

Our family used to call ourselves 'Los Cinquito,' ('The Fabulous Five') and we lived in the heart of the capital city of Argentina in a very quiet residential area called Núñez, with big houses, gardens in bloom and neighbours who have known each other forever.

It was a day just like any other for everyone in the family. It was Friday and dinnertime was approaching. Two of my children went to pick up their girlfriends. My husband had recently had a heart operation and was already home. I was making dinner.

The phone rang. I answered it and it was Juan Manuel, the second of my three boys, who said, 'Mum, gather all the money we have at home and take it to the front door. I will drive by to get it.'

Since I thought he was buying something and needed change, I asked him, 'Tell me Juancho, how much money do you need?'

'Really mum, all the money we have in the house!' he replied.

That was the last time I heard his voice. The last 'mum' he gave me. Kidnappers had intercepted him a few blocks from the house and

made him call us on a mobile phone. Almost instantly his car drove to our house with him and the three kidnappers inside. We gathered all the money we had in the house and my husband went out to give it to them.

In a desperate attempt to see our child, who was sitting in the back seat, my husband peaked into one of

the windows. One of the kidnappers hit him in the face and broke his glasses. They then started the car and left.

They let Juan Manuel off a few blocks from

One bullet was all it took for me to cease being a happy housewife and to push me out on to the streets to seek justice for my son and for so many others.

the house. They let him get out of the car, and just as he was running towards freedom, without any reason or warning, they shot him in the back and killed him.

It is difficult to understand. Juan Manuel gave them everything he owned: jewellery, money, the car. But their greed was greater. They took his life.

The 'kidnap that became a murder,' as the killing of our son was referred to, was an emblematic case that resonated throughout the country. One of the murderers was arrested 20 months ago and given an exemplarily long sentence, but it can still be appealed. The other two are awaiting trial.

JUAN MANUEL'S MURDER was regrettable, but it was not the first or last of its kind. The corruption, complicity and poor performance of some public servants allows crime to prevail. There are many people with guns and they use them to exercise their power.

I am not going to pretend that Juan Manuel's killers can begin to understand how precious the life they destroyed was. It would be absurd to think they would be able to appreciate his values.

Juan Manuel got his bachelor's degree at 21 and worked in his own business. At 23, he was a respectable professional and was about to start a new career as a doctor. He also loved diving. But there was something even more important – everyone who knew him loved him.

He was a wonderful son. A wonderful brother. A wonderful friend. Kind. Noble. Generous. Joyous. A great person, as we say around here. ►



# Americas

## A lucky escape

MARÍA TERESA GUILLÉN CORVERA, COSTA RICA

I WAS RETURNING FROM A trip to Costa Rica's Caribbean and it was raining so I hailed a cab. The cab was identified as it should be, but I didn't take note of the number plate because it was raining and there were a lot of people at the stop.

The cab driver started driving towards my neighbourhood but suddenly he stopped the car and pulled out a gun. He pointed it to my chest and said, 'This is an assault, jump to the front seat!' Then he asked if I had any cash. I told him that I kept my money in the bank, so he drove me to a cash machine.

He was pretty nervous, and he told me that if I said anything to anyone or made anyone suspicious, he would kill me. I tried to keep calm to avoid being shot because he was so jumpy. I even tried to keep a conversation going with him. This relaxed him and before arriving to the bank he told me that he liked me and that I should thank him for not raping me.

As soon as I came out of the bank I gave him the money. He left. I was in shock, and I couldn't stop crying. I even forgot all the phone numbers of my family members and friends.

Later, I made a formal complaint to the police, even though I did not think it would change anything. I felt it was my duty. Two months later, however, I received a call from an investigator. He told me they had received

20 formal complaints from women who had been robbed by a cab driver and were onto the assailant. He also told me his last victims had been raped. The cab driver was subsequently arrested and he is now in jail.

I WAS SO AFFECTED BY the experience that I couldn't sleep at night and could no longer take cabs. Some people asked me uncomfortable questions such as why I went in a cab alone or why I didn't take note of the number plate. Some people said that I should have jumped out of the cab while the robber was driving.

I often think about what would have happened to me if I had been shot on purpose or accidentally, or if I had been beaten and left on the highway. My worst fear was of being sexually assaulted. This is because I am a woman. Maybe a man wouldn't feel the same fear that I feel, and that's why I should be 'thankful' that I wasn't raped.

I often think about what would have happened to me if I had been shot on purpose or accidentally... my worst fear was of being sexually assaulted.

◀ And we could easily imagine him as head of a family and a father.

One bullet was enough to shatter the lives and dreams of those who loved him. It only took one bullet to destroy 'Los Cinquito!'

It only took one bullet to annihilate the possibility of having grandchildren to lengthen our lives.

It only took one bullet for his grandfather to cry himself to death and for his grandmother to live out her years mourning his death.

One bullet was all it took for me to cease being a happy housewife and to push me out on to the streets to seek justice for my son and for so many others.

Marta Elsa Ghiglia de Canillas is Director of the Peace Initiatives Department of the Argentinean Solidarity Network, Vice-President of the Asociación Madres del Dolor, and a volunteer at Missing Children, the Lost Boys of Argentina.

# Americas

## Trying to make a change

KARIN WILSON, USA

I LOST MY BELOVED SON, my only child Christian, on 3 Dec 1999. Just 28 days after he turned 19, he was a man-child, not quite an adult but past adolescence. The millennium came in a way I could have never imagined. The pain is indescribable; the magnitude of my loss makes me inconsolable. I've been wronged and robbed! I'm from the United States, I live in the state of New York, born and raised in the borough of Brooklyn. The US is one of the most powerful and technologically advanced countries on this planet. We haven't fought a war in this country since the American Civil War, a war that was fought from 1861-1865.

Yet in my neighbourhood and in many others in this country we hear gunshots at night. Parents start doing silent headcounts of their children after hearing the sound of gunshots. We have neighbours, friends and family members who were either maimed or killed with a firearm. Because of my son's death I became part of the largest grassroots anti-gun violence movement in the United States.

Let me tell you how my life has changed. I won't have the comfort of my son looking after me in my old age. I won't have my son around making sure I'm eating well, taking my medications properly, taking care of my bills, making sure my house is warm in winter, and the sidewalks shovelled and de-iced when it snows. I don't have any more graduations to attend, or opportunities to applaud successful career achievements. I no longer hear funny stories or jokes (and I was told my son was one of the funniest guys around, he kept people laughing and feeling good.) But worst of all I can't look at or touch him anymore.

You probably have wives and husbands, children and grandchildren. You know it's through our children we get a little bit of immortality. You

know that your face, your body type, your values are going to be around long after you're gone... because of your children. Children are our legacy.

Well I was robbed, and it looks like I won't have a legacy now. My face, my body type, my values will probably disappear when I die – it doesn't look like any part of me will appear in the future. In the next century it will be as if I never, ever existed. And that's pretty sad.

I've learned that there is nothing like definite, overt action to overcome the inertia of grief. Most of us have someone who needs us. If we haven't, we can find someone! So instead of praying for

the strength to survive, I prayed for strength to give away. Then I joined The Million Mom March. I went from being a victim of gun violence to a survivor of gun violence. And now I'm an advocate for survivors.

I'm thoroughly committed to saving other children. Though I couldn't save my own child's life, I'm going to do all I can to save yours.

I KNOW IT IS POSSIBLE to reduce the number of deaths and injuries caused by gun violence. Our children have the right to grow up in environments free from the threat of gun violence. My son certainly had that right which he didn't get.

Our children want to grow old. All humans have the right to be safe from gun violence in their homes, neighbourhoods, schools and places of work and worship.

Gun violence is a public health crisis of global proportions that harms not only the physical, but the spiritual, social and economic health of our families and communities. The Million Mom March has a slogan which I subscribe to 100%: 'No child's life should end with a bang.'

I'm trying to understand why my child had

I've learned that there is nothing like definite, overt action to overcome the inertia of grief.

# Americas

## Immeasurable pain

KAREN VANSKOY, CANADA

ON SEPTEMBER 24, 1996, my beautiful 14 year-old daughter Jasmine (pictured below) was shot in the head by a 17 year-old young man who had obtained a semi-automatic handgun from his stepfather's collection of unsecured guns and ammunition.

I don't know which memories of this event are worse.

Was it saying my last goodbyes to my only daughter while she lay in the hospital bed, her face bruised and bandaged?

Her skull had shattered and her brain exploded when the gun pierced her head. She was already gone. There was only the mechanical rise and fall of her chest.

Or was it returning home for the first time since her death? The walls and floors were covered with blood, decaying flesh and brain matter. The smell was putrid; it was like a scene

from a horror film. No one had advised us that we would be faced with cleaning up the mess.

Then there are the images of my autistic son Jordan describing the blood oozing from her ears and mimicking her killer by grabbing a knife, pointing it and shouting, 'I'll fucking kill you!' I guess I



This act of violence has had negative consequences for her friends, teachers, community and everyone around her. Gun violence affects all of us. We need to work toward creating a culture of safety, security and peace. Gun violence is avoidable.

would have to choose this last memory as the worst because my son Jordan continues to suffer immensely due to the trauma of witnessing the murder of his sister, friend and caregiver.

THE TRUE IMPACT OF GUN violence is immeasurable. My family has not only had to face the death of a child, we've suffered emotional and mental health difficulties, and we lost our home, and much, much more.

Jasmine's death did not affect just us. This act of violence has had negative consequences for her friends, teachers, community and everyone around her. Gun violence affects all of us. We need to work toward creating a culture of safety, security and peace. Gun violence is avoidable.

◀ to die by gunshot, but I don't understand. If I had one wish it would be that all governments would monitor the manufacturing and distribution of firearms and bullets with the same degree of care that they use to monitor the removal of nuclear waste from reactors.

We have an opportunity to change laws and create real accountability on these items. We

have to stand up now and be counted on to do the right thing.

Karin Wilson is a volunteer for the Brooklyn, New York chapter of the Million Mom March, a grassroots organisation campaigning for sensible gun laws. She gave this speech at the United Nations in July 2005.

# Europe

## Living under the gun

VESNA, MACEDONIA

I WAS BEATEN UP BY my husband for the first time soon after our wedding. I thought that it was normal. Soon after that, his verbal and physical assaults became more and more frequent.

During the last 12 years of our marriage, my husband harassed me literally every day and beat both me and my children. On several occasions he chased me out of the house with a gun in his hand.

I did not have anywhere to go and did not dare to leave my home. My parents were not able to help, so I had to bear the harassment.

My husband never had any money to support us, but once a month he would replace his guns. He would often come home very drunk and sit on the table where he would take out his 'new child', as he referred to the guns he obtained from the Old Bazaar [the marketplace in Skopje]. He would stroke and cuddle them as if they were the most important thing in his life. 'You represent everything to me, in good times and in bad. With you, I will get rid of Vesna. I will blow her to pieces,' he would say to his gun.

Then once when he was drunk he shot at me and at my son. I still carry the bullet wounds and my child is receiving psychiatric treatment.

I AM MOST UPSET WITH the police who stood by and did nothing even though they knew there was armed violence in our home and that my husband had an illegal gun. 'Do not argue in front of the children, it is not good for them,' is all they would say when I called on them to intervene.

I am most upset with the police who stood by and did nothing even though they knew there was armed violence in our home and that my husband had an illegal gun.

After 18 years of marriage and 12 years of daily harassment, I finally succeeded in escaping from my home with my young daughter a few months ago, and we are now living in a shelter.



# Information

## Further reading

### Resources from the IANSA Women's Network

IANSA Women's Network Portal and Bulletin:  
<http://www.iansa.org/women>

IANSA Information Kit on Women and Armed Violence: <http://www.iansa.org/women/documents/Women-and-Guns-Information-Kit.pdf>

### Publications

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International Alert, *Inclusive Security, Sustainable Peace: A Toolkit for Advocacy and Action*. [http://www.international-alert.org/our\\_work/themes/gender\\_training.php](http://www.international-alert.org/our_work/themes/gender_training.php)

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### Websites

IANSA Women's Network Portal: <http://www.iansa.org/women>

Peacewomen Project of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF): <http://www.peacewomen.org/>

UNIFEM Portal on Women, Peace and Security: <http://www.womenwarpeace.org/>

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“My hope is that in the future our children will be able to live in peace, free from fear of gun violence.”

Janet Aol, Uganda

## The IANSA Women's Network

WOMEN HAVE TAKEN a leading role in efforts to prevent gun violence all over the world, yet they remain underrepresented in small arms policy and practice. The IANSA Women's Network was founded to connect organisations working on women's issues with the global campaign to control the proliferation and misuse of small arms, and to ensure that this campaign reflects women's concerns and reality. We aim to build a united and dynamic movement of women resisting gun violence around the world.

IANSA Women's Network members come from a diverse range of organisations in every region of the world. They are working to mobilise popular opinion against the proliferation and misuse of small arms, lobbying for policy change at the national, regional and international levels, and

producing much-needed information about the different ways that gun violence affects women, men, girls and boys.

The IANSA Secretariat supports the efforts of Women's Network members by promoting their work to the larger disarmament community, particularly at the UN level, producing information on topics related to women, gender and small arms and acting as a focal point for global policy on gender and small arms. The Women's Network Portal, [www.iansa.org/women](http://www.iansa.org/women), contains the Network's quarterly bulletin, *Women at Work: Preventing Gun Violence*, as well as news and resources on women, gender and small arms.