

2. Why this meeting is important

Shelley Barry

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To be delivered in **English**

My name is Shelley Barry, and I am proudly South African. Thank you to Swaziland for allowing me to use its microphone as this place does not have very good wheelchair access.

I am here because I am a survivor of gun violence. As I speak to you, my voice is being generated by a mechanical speaking valve, without which I would have no voice. But since I do, I feel privileged to share my story. In 1996, en route to a job interview, I was shot at point blank range. I happened to be traveling by taxi and in my country there have been ongoing turf wars between taxi businesses, resulting in much violence.

The driver of the taxi was shot seven times. I sat next to him and watched him die. A bullet severed my spinal cord, punctured both my lungs, cut through several ribs. My partner seated next to me was shot in the chest. Miraculously, we both survived. I would never walk again. I don't know whether the weapon was legal or illegal. That will not make a difference to what happened that day.

After four months in hospital, I was forced, as a highly educated woman, to work in a menial job, earning less than USD 200 a month, most of which had to go towards medical bills.

It has now been ten years since my injury and I have worked extensively as a disability rights advocate in my country.

I am about to graduate with my master of fine arts degree in filmmaking from Temple University in the United States. I am making films. I am fulfilling my dreams. But this does not take away the fact that what happened to me was not necessary.

For as long as I live, I will speak out on gun violence because I know that the impact of small arms and light weapons is obvious to all of us every day. Many of us choose to ignore the tragedies, but we don't have to. Armed violence is a global concern. And it is destroying our societies. There is no other choice but to take this issue very seriously.

Survivors of armed violence maintain the potential to play a valuable role in their families and communities - but only if they receive the help that they need for effective rehabilitation and reintegration.

These needs are quite straightforward really:

- first, data and information collection so that States and civil society know the extent of the challenge we face;
- second, appropriate emergency and medical care;

- third, physical rehabilitation;
- fourth, psychological support, and help to reintegrate societies;
- fifth, economic reintegration, so that survivors can once more become productive members of society;
- and sixth, appropriate laws and public policies to ensure equal access to rights and prevent discrimination.

Five years ago, UN Member States committed themselves to address the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects. Responding to the realities of survivors of small arms related violence falls squarely within this mandate.

Thank you