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Promoting development friendly policies is also essential to achieve long term security and prosperity



Peter Barcroft, Photo: SK Enamul Haq

Amitava Kar

*In an exclusive interview with **The Daily Star**, Peter Barcroft, Director of the Peace and Democracy Programme of Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA), talks to **Amitava Kar** about better regulating small arms and light weapon transfers worldwide. He was in Dhaka recently to organise a Regional Asia Parliamentary Workshop on the Regulation of Small Arms and Light Weapons and Mitigation of Armed Violence together with Dhaka based organisation, ChangeMaker.*

Could you please give us a background of this workshop?

The goal of the workshop is to improve the regulation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and contribute towards the mitigation of armed violence in South Asia and Southeast Asia. We are doing this against the backdrop of a situation (not unique to this region) where inadequate control and regulation of SALW is continuing to cause enormous human suffering, law and order and security problems. These legislators have come together because they share this concern. They wanted to identify ways in which they can have an impact and improve the situation. They are trying to encourage their respective governments to sign up for treaties that deal with these problems. Legislators from seven countries in the region are participating – Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Maldives, Malaysia, Nepal and Pakistan. They also recognise

that inadequate regulation of SALW has a serious, adverse impact on sustainable development in their respective countries and the Plan of Action that they adopted at the conclusion of this workshop specifically takes this into account.

We always hear about regulating exports of small arms. Is enough emphasis given on controlling small arms ammunition?

There has existed for some time a recognition that we cannot find a truly effective solution to this problem unless we address the issue of access to and regulation of ammunition at the same time.

In the negotiation of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) which is the most recent initiative to deal with this problem, as well as certain other conventional weapons, a lot of discussions took place on whether or not to include ammunition. There were some countries and regions that strongly supported it, notably in Africa, but also among many countries in Latin America, Caribbean and elsewhere. Others were less receptive to this reality, notably large exporting countries. In the end, a compromise was found. So the text of the Arms Trade Treaty contains specific language that also imposes obligations vis-à-vis ammunition transfers.

Given the rise of improvised weapons like IEDs in some parts of the world, do you think that it is important to redefine SALW?

While there is currently no universally recognised definition of SALW, it is extensive and when countries sign up for these international treaties that better regulate trade in SALW, they can also, at their discretion, introduce their own legislation defining SALW at the national level. IEDs are, of course, a source of massive human suffering and used increasingly by terrorists and insurgents, but it is important at the same time to identify the best way to regulate them and this may not always necessarily be within the scope of an existing arms treaty whose main focus is on cross border transfers of arms/weapons.

Could you give us an idea about the roles that governments around the world are playing to combat this problem? How many countries have ratified the ATT?

Seventy two countries have ratified the treaty and a hundred and thirty countries have signed it. This is actually quite a remarkable feat because the treaty was only adopted in April 2013. It entered into force in December 2014. Bangladesh has signed the treaty, but has not yet ratified it. We hope the Government of Bangladesh will take this step very soon.

The timing of this workshop is also quite propitious as it coincides with the First Conference of the State Parties of the ATT in Mexico. They are meeting for the first time in a formal setting to make some extremely important decisions as to how to implement and move forward with the ATT in the future.

Do you think laws are enough? How do we look at this issue in a more comprehensive way?

Laws in and of themselves are not enough. They have to be enforced and implemented. Resources need to be made available to this end. The ATT itself envisions the setting up of a trust fund to help countries that will require assistance and cooperation.

The ATT, however, in and of itself, will not solve this global problem alone. There are broader issues that need to be addressed simultaneously. Poverty and unemployment which may feed into religious extremism are all parts of this overall equation. Promoting development friendly policies is also essential to achieve long term security and prosperity. A holistic approach at the national, regional and international level is what is required.