

IRIN

In-Depth

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Guns Out of Control: the continuing threat of small arms

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1. Features - Small arms: the real weapons of mass destruction



Easily available and simple to use, small arms are the most common instruments of modern violence.
Credit: Edward Parsons/IRIN

Are small arms, as many describe them, the real weapons of mass destruction? Easily available and simple to use, small arms are the instruments of modern violence. The

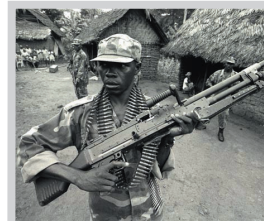
75 percent of the total annual production.

The trade in small arms takes various forms. The majority of the 7 million to 8 million new guns produced every year form the legal trade in small arms, that is the trade authorised by governments. However, limited controls of this legal trade, and a failure to enforce them, means that many arms are diverted into the illegal sector. The thriving black market trade in small arms provides guns to people who cannot obtain them legally, even though the vast majority of these guns have origins in the legal sector. The failure by most states to consider fully the end use of the weapons they export means that small arms often fall into irresponsible hands.

global trade in these weapons is scarcely regulated, and continues to fuel both armed conflict and violent crime. Until transfers of small arms are controlled, and limited, the human costs and the implications for long-term development will continue to be devastating.

While calls for an international arms trade treaty are supported by some major arms-exporting nations, such as Great Britain, the industry shows no sign of diminishing. Indeed, between 1960 and 1999, the Britain-based Omega Foundation found the number of companies manufacturing small arms had increased six-fold.

Small arms have a disproportionate impact – while accounting for only one-fifth of the global arms trade, they maim and kill far more than any other conventional weapons. Small arms were the most commonly used weapons – and in some instances the only weapons – used in the 101 conflicts fought worldwide between 1989 and 1996. They are relatively inexpensive, portable and easy to use, and are effortlessly recycled from one conflict or violent community to the next. Their durability perpetuates their lethality. An assault rifle, for example, can be operational for 20 to 40 years with little maintenance.



According to official records, almost all of the G8 countries have in recent years exported small arms to countries where there are major human rights concerns.
Credit: Brent Stirton/OCHA

Irresponsible exporting

The annual value of all authorised international exports of small arms, at approximately US\$4 billion, may be only a fraction of the world trade, but it is an industry that causes disproportionate damage, with many guns ending up in irresponsible hands.

All agencies involved in the fight against small arms agree that now is a critical time to curtail the further proliferation of small arms. A study commissioned by the United Nations World Health Organization and the World Bank found that by 2020, the number of deaths and injuries resulting from war and violence would overtake the number of deaths caused by diseases such as measles and malaria. In addition, 2006 is a significant year with respect to efforts to control the global trade in small arms. A major UN conference to review the organisation's process on small arms will take place in July, and it is possible a resolution will be proposed in the UN General Assembly First Committee on Disarmament and Security in October to begin negotiations for an arms-trade treaty. Perhaps the catalogue of despair associated with small arms will begin to be addressed on the world stage.

Although more than 90 countries can, or do, produce small arms, it is the world's most powerful nations that lead the sector. The value of small arms exports from the US in 2001 stood at \$741 million, while the value of small arms exports from all G8 countries for the same year totalled almost \$1.5 billion. Other major exporters include Belgium, Brazil, Austria, Spain, China, Israel, Switzerland and the Czech Republic.

The big business of small arms

At the core of the problem is the global trade in small arms and light weapons, which is ever-burgeoning and fundamentally unregulated. Small arms continue to devastate while key producers and brokers rake in profits. In addition, the majority of small arms are produced in the most powerful countries in the world: according to the Small Arms Survey, an independent research project based in Geneva, the United States and the European Union combined account for about

The governments of key exporting countries may point to their stringent controls of small-arms exports, but many continue to transfer arms to irresponsible end users, that is, countries in which the weapons would likely be used to fuel armed violence or to contribute to human rights violations. The irresponsible exporting of small arms is made possible by an absence of export controls or a failure to enforce existing controls, or by loopholes in the law. "The issue of weapons is very close to governments and their national security priorities. Normal trade regulations cease to apply, and governments are reluctant to make compromises in this area," explained Debbie Hillier, Oxfam's policy advisor on small arms.

Indeed, almost all the G8 countries have in recent years exported small arms to countries where there are major human rights concerns, including Algeria, India, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Sierra Leone. Some small-arms exports have been directly linked to human rights violations. Reports from Algeria, for example, suggested that sporting and hunting weapons were used by 'death squads' to massacre civilians in 1997. In 2003, a contingent of such weapons worth \$1.7 million was shipped to Algeria by the Russian Federation.

The developing world also spends massively on small arms. While information collated by the Norwegian Initiative on Small Arms Transfers (NISAT), a research coalition of nongovernmental organisations, suggested the majority of small arms exported by western European countries remains in the region or goes to North America, guns to the value of \$200 million were exported to Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Middle East in just one year, a value equivalent to hundreds of thousands of weapons. This figure also does not account for the weapons transferred to, and within, the developing world through black market trading.

An absence of global standards

There are currently no universally accepted, legally binding global standards that apply in every country to prevent irresponsible arms transfers. The duty to control small-arms transfers ultimately lies with governments, demanding both the will and capacity to act at the government level if effective legislation is to be enacted. National-level export regimes are often flawed by legislative loopholes that permit the transfer of small arms to irresponsible end users, or lack laws to prohibit arms brokering.

While the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons, the result of a 2001 conference, defines measures the governments of member states should take to prevent and control black market arms transfers and brokering, it is not binding.

Equally, regional agreements covering the licensed arms trade, such as the European Union Code of Conduct on Arms Exports, only give recommendations to governments. The EU code of conduct may suggest admirable criteria for signatories to consider when granting export licences to arms manufacturers, but it has failed to prevent certain transfers that resulted in gross human rights abuses. Asking governments to notify all other members of licence denials certainly does not ensure notification; particularly as such non-binding agreements can be interpreted differently by participants.

Such agreements are further weakened by omissions. The UN programme of action fails to address the licensed arms trade in any form, while regional agreements often address only specific aspects of the arms trade. In addition, existing regional and international agreements only request that governments act to curb future arms transfers, proposing little regarding

the control of arms already in circulation. By focusing on simply controlling the supply of arms, these agreements also fail to recognise the significance of demand – as long as there is demand, arms production will continue, and, in the absence of stringent, universal controls, many of these arms will inevitably find themselves in the wrong hands. A critical aspect of controlling the illicit arms trade must therefore be the eradication, or at least the reduction, of demand.

Legislative failure at the national level

Without being legally bound by international agreements to control the trade in small arms, states by and large have demonstrated little inclination to implement effective laws.

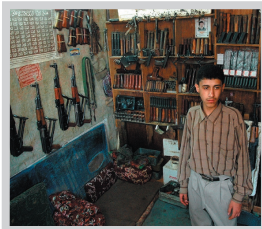
Indeed, a 2005 independent review of progress of the UN Programme of Action, by *Biting the Bullet* – a joint project between International Alert, Saferworld and the University of Bradford – and the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), documented a veritable absence of action by states. Laws governing arms transfers were found to be inadequate or out-of-date in many countries. The review noted that more than 100 states have failed to enact what is considered to be a minimum step towards implementation – that is, establishing governmental bodies to coordinate action on small arms at a national level – while more than 120 countries have failed even to review their laws and regulations on small arms.

In instances where there are more comprehensive export-control regimes, legislative loopholes undermine their efficacy. By licensing production to another country – that is, outsourcing production, often to the purchasing country – labour costs are lowered and controls over arms transfers that may apply in some countries can be evaded. Research by the Omega Foundation suggested that companies in at least 15 countries, including the US, United Kingdom, Russia, France, Germany and Switzerland, have established agreements permitting the production of arms in 45 other countries.

In addition, major producers have repeatedly shown a disregard for UN arms embargoes, continuing to export to countries plagued by conflict and insecurity. According to the Control Arms campaign, a global partnership between Amnesty International, Oxfam and IANSA, every one of the 13 embargoes imposed by the UN in the last 10 years has been repeatedly violated, with very few of the embargo breakers named in UN sanctions reports successfully prosecuted.

Arms embargoes are also rarely applied. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) found that between 1990 and 2001, there were 57 separate major armed conflicts, with only eight of them subject to UN arms embargoes. "Such embargoes are usually late and blunt instruments, and the UN sanctions committees, which oversee the embargoes, have to rely largely on member states to monitor and implement them," SIPRI said. "Therefore,

arms embargoes cannot be deployed effectively as an instrument by the UN to prevent illicit arms trafficking, without better national controls on international arms transfers. These controls are woefully inadequate.”



A Yemenite arms merchant shows his cache of weapons. Absence of control in the trade in small arms means that guns can be easily diverted into the black market.
Credit: Edward Parsons/IRIN

Diversion into the black market

Not only does the legal trade in small arms sometimes directly supply irresponsible end users, the absence of controls means guns can easily be diverted into the black market. Estimates suggest that 80 percent to 90 percent

of the small arms traded on the black market originate in state-sanctioned trade.

While the value of the black market trade in small arms may be relatively small-scale – worth around \$1 billion – it is almost impossible to control. In addition, the durability of small arms means they can easily be recycled from one conflict to another, or passed between the hands of different criminals. The recent conflicts in West Africa are but one arresting example of this, with guns passing from, and continuing to wreak devastation in, Sierra Leone to Liberia, and now most recently to Côte d'Ivoire.

Small arms move into the illegal arena in various ways. Governments at war, for example, may transfer weapons to sympathetic nonstate actors. Security forces and other authorised weapons users may supply and sell arms, while civilians, aided by inadequate regulation, can purchase firearms and then illegally sell them on, in a process known as the 'ant trade'.

Weapons may be purchased or stolen from poorly guarded government stockpiles, or recovered from the battlefield following combat. In 2002, for example, arms collected in Albania were transferred to Rwanda, from where they were allegedly passed on to eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In addition, disarmament programmes or changes of weaponry by armed forces can flood the black market with weapons, as was the case after former Warsaw Pact countries sold off the standard arms they had been using.

Arms brokers – effectively middlemen – also play a key role, and have been implicated in supplying some of the worst conflict zones and areas most notorious for human rights abuses, including Afghanistan, Angola, the DRC, Iraq, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and South Africa. As the arrangement of arms deals is an unregulated area, arms brokers can operate outside the law and traffic arms illegally on behalf of governments or private actors. Even where controls do exist at the national level – fewer than 40 countries were found in 2005 to have them – brokers either rely on a lack of political will to enforce such laws or simply move offshore.

Arms embargoes are also no barrier. Brokers find ways of either avoiding controls or colluding with authorities. Creating a complex supply chain involving many front companies and handling agents, using fraudulent or misleading paperwork, and routing deliveries through third countries that may not be subject to embargo restrictions are just some of the tactics deployed by brokers.

Progress – but not enough

Although the global trade in small arms may ultimately be unregulated, it is important to acknowledge the significant progress of recent years in establishing instruments and processes at the international, regional and national levels. The Control Arms campaign has worked extensively to bring the issue to the fore.

The UN process on small arms was launched with the first international conference on small arms in July 2001, which produced the aforementioned UN Programme of Action. While the document has been criticised for neglecting various key issues, notably those of civilian possession, transfers to nonstate actors and the misuse of arms by state forces, it served to put small arms on the agenda for many states. A final review conference on the effectiveness of this process is due in July of this year, following two biennial conferences in 2003 and 2005.

Also in 2003, Barbara Frey was appointed UN special rapporteur on the prevention of human rights violations committed with small arms and light weapons. According to Frey, “Small arms have a pervasive impact on human rights, and it is thus of vital importance to highlight this impact and to outline what legal obligations states may have to take steps against such abuses.”

In 2001, the UN also agreed on the Firearms Protocol, the first legally binding international agreement on small arms, amongst other things criminalising the illicit trafficking of firearms. It fails, however, to address some key issues or establish criteria to govern transfers, and only 49 states have signed and ratified the protocol.

A growing number of regional agreements have also been concluded, demonstrating the importance of regional cooperation, especially where borders are porous. While many are neither binding nor comprehensive, some go much further than the UN programme of action and are legally binding. This is true of the Southern African Development Community [SADC] Protocol and the Nairobi Protocol, which covers the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa. These also totally prohibit civilian possession and the use of all light weapons.

As discussed, legislation on small arms has been enacted in many countries. However, there relatively few countries with effective legislation, and global standards are ultimately vital. If neighbouring coun-

tries have weaker legislation, guns may simply leak across the border.

While all of these developments are steps in the right direction, the trade in small arms is unrelenting, and human costs are as patent as ever.

Small arms – a disproportionate human impact



It is estimated that 60,000 to 90,000 are killed by small arms in conflict setting around the world each year. In many of these conflicts, civilian deaths outnumber those of combatants.
Credit: Brent Stirton/OCHA

The less controlled the trade in small arms, the more devastating the human impact. From the direct effects of death and injury on the lives of individuals and their families to the broader implications for communities and long-term development, the need to prevent further unregulated proliferation of small arms has never

been more apparent. It is in response to this urgent human need that numerous agencies have united to document these effects and to urge action to combat the trade in small arms.

Direct casualties

The Small Arms Survey estimated that 300,000 people are shot dead over the course of a year. Gun homicides account for around 200,000 of these deaths, the majority occurring in Latin America and the Caribbean, while 60,000 to 90,000 people are killed by small arms in conflict settings. In many contemporary conflicts, civilian deaths outnumber those of combatants.

Approximately 50,000 more deaths result from gun suicides. Over one million people are believed to suffer firearms-related injuries on an annual basis. While the accuracy of these figures can never be guaranteed, given that much data is inevitably incomplete, the magnitude is sobering.

While men are the primary perpetrators, and indeed victims, of armed violence, vulnerable groups are often disproportionately affected. Women and children are killed and injured in great numbers. Many are victims of sexual violence committed at gunpoint, and they usually constitute a large number of those forcibly displaced by armed violence. Gender is a critical factor in determining the nature of the impact of armed violence.

[For more information, see *Small arms, Gender and Age*]

Human rights violations

Numerous human rights violations are perpetrated with small arms – indeed the manifold abuses committed at gunpoint reflect the unparalleled coercive power of the gun. The threat of a firearm renders vic-

tims largely unable to run away or defend themselves. Atrocities ranging from torture and arbitrary arrest to abduction and the silencing of political opposition are all frequently 'assisted' by small arms. Guns have facilitated both systematic rape in war and intimate-partner violence in the home. Armed violence is also intrinsically linked to forced migration.

"It is hard to imagine a small group of people terrorising and forcibly evicting entire communities without weapons such as AK-47s," argued Cate Buchanan, manager of the Human Security and Small Arms Programme at the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue in Geneva. "It is often noted that although the majority of killings in the Rwandan genocide were committed with blades, guns were needed to round up the victims and keep them surrounded before killing them."

Indirect deaths

Indirect deaths, in addition to tangible fatal and non-fatal injuries, are a critical human cost of small arms. Although ultimately unquantifiable, indirect deaths represent those who did not die from a bullet wound, but as a result of circumstances caused by armed violence. Be it through starvation or the withdrawal of aid, such excess mortality cannot, of course, be pinned wholly on firearms. However, despite many other influential factors, the consequences of armed violence, and conflict in particular, are severe and lasting.

"We have typically looked at the body count when assessing the impact of weapons, but it is misleading to look only at the direct deaths," said Debbie Hillier of Oxfam. "In the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, large numbers of people have been killed directly, either in combat or in the crossfire. However, 95 percent of the deaths were caused not by bullets, but by malnutrition or preventable diseases such as malaria, which were contracted when people were forced out of their homes by the conflict."

A gun may not ostensibly be culpable for the death of a malnourished child. This child, however, may have been forced to leave his home at gunpoint in a time of war, to flee from productive land and a nearby clinic to a locale so militarised that even the most hardened aid agencies have given up attempting to supply food and medical aid. The ultimate cause of death may be starvation, but the chaos and destruction perpetrated at the barrel of a gun lay the foundation of this tragic end, illustrating the indirect, destructive impact of guns in unregulated settings.

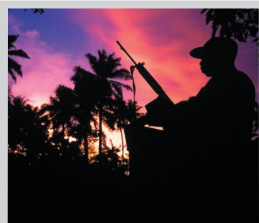
In countries at peace, the indirect effects of gun violence are also significant, if less multifarious. Victims and witnesses of such violence experience a decline in physical and mental health, resulting in inflated costs for society in terms of treatment for firearm-related injury and lost productivity through disability or premature death. A survey in the US estimated the annual cost of gun violence to be \$80 million. While countries such as the US may be able to absorb such extra outlay

relatively easily, the cost of armed violence of any form has serious implications for the long-term development prospects of more marginalised countries.

"It is clear that the gun business is simply not worth enough money to make tolerating gun violence worthwhile," said IANSA's Rebecca Peters. "A member of IANSA in El Salvador has calculated that the extra annual costs associated with dealing with gunshot injuries would equal the cost of a brand new hospital. ... The sums just do not add up."

Development derailed – the long-term costs of small arms

"There is no long-term security without development. There is no development without security." – UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, January 2006



Violence associated with the proliferation of small arms is increasingly recognized as having hugely detrimental effects on development goal and the stability of a country.
Credit: Brent Stirton/OCHA

Development and a reduction of violence go hand in hand. The more rights that are guaranteed, and the more choices and opportunities people have, the less people will turn to violence. The less violence there is, the greater the likelihood of such advances. However, the converse is also true, and the violence associated

with the proliferation of small arms is increasingly recognised as having hugely detrimental effects on development goals.

Small-arms availability places a significant strain on communities, and particularly those in the developing world, which are much more likely to experience civil conflict and violent crime. Excess mortality is just one manifestation of the suffering indirectly caused by small arms. The displacement of people, pronounced in areas of armed violence, disrupts access to health-care facilities, to education, and to productive land and markets. The power of armed groups to requisition supplies and sexual services further taxes the civilian population, while firearm-related fatal and nonfatal injuries overextend healthcare facilities.

In the short term, secondary consequences of armed violence include malnutrition, the spread of preventable disease, the incapacitation of sections of the population due to psychiatric disorders, and an increase in child mortality. Effects in the longer term include the militarisation of society and damage to societal structure, infrastructure collapse, declining economic activity and diminished trade and investment, resource exploitation and environmental degradation, the reduction of development gains, and the decline of humanitarian assistance.

In addition, the continued availability of arms in post-conflict environments will fuel future violence,

pushing the spiral of underdevelopment further downward. Analysis suggests that half of newly pacified countries will revert to war within a decade. The presence of small arms sustains insecurity – violence is legitimised and in the absence of a strong state, and civilians will turn to guns for protection. Violent crime becomes a viable means of survival, further destabilising already fragile communities and transferring violence to otherwise unaffected areas. In such a context, both emergency relief and long-term development programming do little more than act as palliatives.

As Debbie Hillier of Oxfam stated, "Development cannot happen in an insecure environment. Whether in conflict situations or in communities where there are large numbers of weapons, development is unlikely." This vicious cycle of overarmament and underdevelopment is reflected by the fact that of the 34 countries at the bottom of the UN Development Programme's 2000 Human Development Index, more than 20 were severely affected by conflict.

Assistance denied – small arms and humanitarian space

One impact of armed violence on long-term development that has recently attracted attention is the potential threat to humanitarian activity. The threat of such violence may cause the suspension of aid programmes or prompt a shift to the provision of aid by military forces. Ultimately, those in dire need of relief are the ones who suffer most.

Increasingly, humanitarian workers are not only caught in the crossfire but also directly targeted. More than 100 civilian UN and NGO workers were killed in the course of duty between July 2003 and July 2004. Figures from the US Department of State suggest the number of aid workers killed in 2003 eclipsed the number of deaths in previous years. The risk has not declined – 13 humanitarian workers were killed in Afghanistan during the first six months of 2004, while nine UN peacekeepers were murdered in the DRC in February 2005. Guns have played a significant role – of the 200 UN personnel killed between 1992 and 2000, 75 percent of these deaths involved firearms.

The 'No Relief' study of humanitarian workers, conducted by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, found that many aid workers are explicitly threatened with criminal violence by civilians with guns. Such security threats can have potentially vast knock-on effects in terms of human suffering. In an insecure humanitarian space, relief workers often cannot access their beneficiaries. Money is diverted from relief operations – in many organisations, 5 percent to 30 percent of the operating budget is spent on security. Ultimately, and especially if personnel are being intentionally victimised, projects may be suspended. In the past two years, for example, attacks on relief workers have prompted withdrawals from Iraq, Darfur, southern Sudan and Afghanistan (by, amongst others, Médecins Sans Frontières, which had been operational there for 24 years). As Buchanan explained,

"As these [aid operations] ... are often the primary sources of assistance to populations in dire need, the impacts of a few armed attacks can be catastrophic for thousands."

Increased insecurity has prompted a shift to the use of military forces for the delivery of aid. While this shift may be a necessary one, it has compromised the traditional separation of military and humanitarian operations. Not only has the blurring of this distinction placed humanitarian agencies at greater risk, it has also damaged the accepted political neutrality of aid.

A time to act

These multifarious, and generally devastating, effects of the unregulated proliferation of small arms highlight the urgency with which action must be taken. This need for action echoes the calls that have been made again and again in the past decade by both mainstream and specialist international NGOs, various UN agencies, individual activists and some states.

While progress has been made in recent years at the national, regional and international levels, global and universal standards, to which all countries are bound, are still needed. The call for such standards – to cover both legal and illegal transfers as well as control the brokering, licensing and transit of small arms – is part of the core recommendations from agencies working to address the problem. Although there will always be a demand for weapons, effective control of the trade would significantly curtail the supply of guns, which is an important first step.

Small arms, Gender and Age



Women and girls are on the frontline when it comes to the impact of small arms. Here an older woman shows scars of bullet wounds on her head. The 12 year old girl with her was kept as a sex slave /'bush wife' by a rebel commander. Liberia.
Credit: Brent Stirton/OCHA

greatest burden.

Men and guns

While small-arms misuse may disproportionately affect the most vulnerable groups – women, children, the displaced – men are almost always the buyers, owners and users of guns. In conflict, they constitute the majority of armed forces, and thus the majority

of combat deaths. Many agencies and studies have concluded that small arms have a disproportionate impact on women and children compared with men. Both gender and age alter the experience of small-arms violence, and it is often vulnerable groups that bear the

greatest burden. The 2004 Small Arms Survey Yearbook observed that armed violence in peacetime is "an overwhelmingly male phenomenon". In many cultures, masculine identities are grounded upon the possession of guns. In Acholi communities in Uganda, for example, a boy becomes a man when he receives his first gun. When violent notions of manhood coincide with cultures marked by violence and in which small arms are easily available, violent solutions are sought above peaceful ones. Yet increased levels of violence, made all the more lethal through arms proliferation, often have the most devastating impact on a society's most vulnerable groups.

Bearing the burden

Vulnerable groups often share characteristics that mean they are disproportionately affected by armed violence. In industrialised countries, the economically marginalised are less able to absorb the costs of injury to themselves or family members, as they are often without insurance and have limited access to healthcare. Worldwide, but particularly in developing countries, where many may rely on the income of few, the loss or injury of a breadwinner is significant. With armed violence promoting human insecurity, it is no coincidence either that the majority of people who have been forcibly displaced are women and children, that is, those who are less able to defend themselves.

In many communities, not only will the burden of

care of injured family members fall on women and children, but their suffering will be compounded by limited access to the labour market. Equally, in societies where women are perceived as having a lower status, infrastructure collapse may mean that women and girls are sidelined in the provision of healthcare and education. Desperation stemming from impoverishment and forced flight can result in women and children turning to prostitution, commercial labour and domestic servitude. Future community exclusion is but one tragic outcome.

Sexual violence at gunpoint



Small arms allow men to develop a 'grab' culture where they take what they want by force. In eastern DRC tens of thousands of girls and women have been raped at gun points in recent years. Credit: IRIN

For women, armed violence is often combined with sexual violence, and countless examples have demonstrated how the proliferation of guns is often associated with an increase in incidents of rape. With men almost always the bearers of guns, power imbalances between men and women are

further distorted. Firearms are not only used to facilitate rape and sexual assault, but armed violence and conflict also remove society's normal restraints on men. In addition, the absence of rule of law allows security forces to perpetrate sexual abuses with impunity. Stress in post-conflict environments, combined with the diffusion of small arms into communities, engenders a rise in intimate-partner violence. Even in nonconflict settings, women are more likely to be attacked by a partner if a gun is available; in 2003 'The American Journal of Public Health' found that access to a gun increased the likelihood of a woman being killed by her husband fivefold.

As combatants, or in other roles within armed groups, women and children often suffer disproportionately. The 2004 report of the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers recorded that between 2001 and 2004, armed fighting in 21 states around the world had involved children under the age of 18, while at any one time it is believed that 300,000 children are actively fighting as soldiers. Both governments and nonstate actors have been complicit in the recruitment of children for use in armed conflict. Children, in particular, may be recruited through forced abduction, while women may be enticed with promises of greater gender equality, which often may remain unfulfilled. Female combatants are often exploited as sex slaves under the threat of armed violence.

Children in thrall

For children, armed violence can mean a lost childhood. Particularly in countries afflicted by conflict, generations of children may never see the inside of a classroom, subject instead to a "Kalashnikov culture". They may not have adequate access to healthcare or food. These consequences, combined with the disabling effects of small-arms injuries and the psychological trauma of witnessing, experiencing or perpetrating violence, will have knock-on effects for the rest of their lives. The loss of opportunities in turn will make children more vulnerable to exploitation and forced migration. Indeed, the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers also estimated in their 2004 report that children accounted for nearly half of the world's refugees and displaced people.

2. Frontlines - BURUNDI: Security has improved, but small arms still pose a serious challenge



In Burundi, young girls and women are often the victims of sexual violence at gunpoint.
Credit: IRIN

ending 12 years of civil war in the Central African country.

Overall, security conditions across Burundi have improved, despite continued attacks by the country's remaining rebel group, the Forces Nationales de liberation (FNL), led by Agathon Rwaswa. However, police records of criminal acts committed mostly in the capital, Bujumbura, suggest that the problem of small arms must be dealt with before the rule of law can really take hold in this fledgling democracy.

According to Maj Céléstin Nibona, the Bujumbura regional police superintendent, 11 acts of armed banditry were committed in Bujumbura capital during the month of February alone. Four persons were injured, and several properties stolen. Although armed banditry targeting vehicles and motorcycles declined during the first months of the year compared with 2005, acts of armed banditry remained high, he said.

"Killing, rape, harassment at gunpoint, injuries - small arms claim a victim each day," said Capitoline Ngenzahayo, the executive secretary of the Compagnie des Apôtres de la Paix (CAP), a local civil-society organisation involved in the fight against small arms. Although no formal survey had been conducted, the number of small arms in the country was estimated at between 200,000 and 300,000, Ngenzahayo said.

According to Col Déo Hakiza, Bujumbura deputy police superintendent, the most common small arms in Burundi are Russian-made Kalashnikovs, or AK-47s, and, to a lesser extent, Belgian-made rifles. Years of civil war had created a high demand for weapons and produced an environment highly conducive to the prevalence of small arms, both in the country and in the region as well. "They not only circulate within one country's borders but also move from one country to another in the Great Lakes region," Hakiza said.

Following the outbreak of civil war in Burundi in 1993, the government of President Pierre Buyoya distributed arms to the population, particularly to paramilitary youths known as Guardians de la paix (Guardians of Peace) to protect civilians against rebel attacks.

The prevalence of small arms and light weapons in Burundi threatens to undermine state authority, despite democratic elections having been held in 2005,

Individuals also bought weapons for their own personal security. These weapons now circulate from one person to another.

According to Nibona, unemployed people who have weapons hire them out to criminals as a means to earn a living. In a January 2006 report on arms circulation in Burundi and eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, the Belgium-based Groupe de Recherche et d'Information sur la Paix et la Sécurité (GRIP) stated that owners hire out weapons at 50,000 francs (US \$50) per night.

Armed banditry is not the preserve of civilians alone. Hakiza said other agents include FNL combatants, demobilised soldiers as well as police and soldiers. According to a report by the Centre d'Alerte et de Prévention des Conflits (CENAP) released in Bujumbura on 29 March, "Eighty percent of criminal acts are imputed to police agents and soldiers whether demobilised or still active."

As a result, the government put in place measures to prevent the misuse of weapons by law enforcement officers. One such measure was to prohibit police officers and soldiers from carrying firearms when not on duty. To limit the circulation of weapons, the government has also established programmes to disarm civilians and to demobilise soldiers, former combatants and militias.

Disarmament efforts

The Commission Nationale pour la Demobilisation, la Reinsertion, et la Rehabilitation des Combattants (CNDRR) began its work on 12 September 2005, with the demobilisation of former Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie-Forces Nationales pour la défense de la démocratie (CNDD-FDD) militias and paramilitary youths. However, after just one month, Burundian President Pierre Nkurunziza sacked the commission members - following a series of complaints and demonstrations against them by paramilitary youths, who demanded payment of demobilisation fees - and replaced them with a new team.

While the newly appointed commission did not embark on the disarmament of civilians, Brig-Gen Silas Ntigurirwa, the executive secretary of the demobilisation programme, announced on 10 February, that at least 20,000 former combatants, including child soldiers, had returned to their families following demobilisation. He said Burundi's demobilisation programme had entered its final stage, with 5,000 former members of the armed forces due to be demobilised this year. He also said the country's new National Defence Forces had been reduced to 25,000, in compliance with a government requirement.



South African peacekeeping troops in Burundi. The fragile security environment in Burundi, and in the Great Lakes region in general, still represents a potential danger for Burundians, forcing them to cling to their weapons.
Credit: IRIN

On 29 March, Brig Gen Evariste Ndayishimiye, the minister of interior and public security, announced that more than 19,000 militias and guardians de la paix had been demobilised and their weapons collected.

Continuing challenges

While the demobilisation programme seems to have made progress, measures to disarm civilians have only just been implemented. On 13 April, President Nkurunziza announced that civilians in possession of weapons had three weeks to register the guns or risk being arrested for illegal ownership. He also praised the 3,000 people who had already chosen to hand in their guns.

Whatever efforts the government makes to disarm the population and limit the circulation of small arms, it still faces many challenges. The fragile security envi-

ronment in Burundi – and in the Great Lakes region in general – has compelled many Burundians to cling to their weapons. “Getting accustomed to a weapon means that a climate of insecurity is created by its absence,” Hakiza said.

Tackling corruption is another issue that Burundian analysts consider crucial to limiting the proliferation of small arms. According to Ngenzahayo, many senior officials who are afraid of being prosecuted for their own misdemeanours supply weapons to armed groups to keep the new leadership focused on security issues rather than on economic crimes. Until such matters are effectively addressed, small arms will continue to pose a significant threat to political stability in Burundi.

COTE D’IVOIRE: Growing up amid weapons in a rebel town



Mural in Korhongo, in the rebel-held north of the country. In this part of the country, children have become accustomed to the presence of armed men.
Credit: Pauline Bax/IRIN

headquarters in Bouake, Kumba is no longer afraid of the armed men who control her town.

What do kids living in a town like this learn? Kumba giggles as her kid brother shyly recites the new words the military occupation has taught him. “Rocket-propelled grenade. Machine gun. 12-7. And PA - PA stands for automatic pistol,” he explained.

Cote d’Ivoire has been divided into a rebel-held north and a government-controlled south since a group of disgruntled soldiers attempted to topple the regime of President Laurent Gbagbo in September 2002. After failing to seize the southern port city and seat of gov-

ernment, Abidjan, the rebels moved north and set up offices in the country’s second biggest town, Bouake. By late 2002, this once-bustling commercial town in central Cote d’Ivoire was awash with rebel soldiers manning improvised roadblocks. Pick-up trucks mounted with machine guns sped through the streets. After the rebels signed a peace deal with the government in January 2003, French troops set up military camps in former office buildings. Later, United Nations peacekeepers moved in to maintain a fragile peace from behind razor-wire fences. Yet it is the New Forces rebel movement that runs Bouake.

Residents point out that the town has always been highly militarised: before the war, it was an important base for the Ivorian armed forces. Although the grown-ups who decided to stay on under rebel command have accepted and even become accustomed to the new leadership, the rebels’ impact on the children of Bouake has been considerable.

“You can’t have a child pick up some kind of object, or he will pretend that it’s a weapon,” said Ibrahima Doumbia, spokesman of the local branch of the Ivorian Movement for Human Rights. “The warlords are a role model for young boys. I have a five-year-old who knows everything about arms. He is always pestering me: ‘Daddy, why don’t you become a soldier?’”

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To keep children away from the gun-toting men, most parents knew there was only one solution: reopen the town's schools, which were closed down most when the government fled to the south when the rebels took control. "During the early days of the rebellion, school was the last of our worries. We were preoccupied with day-to-day survival," said Ibrahima Coulibaly, a volunteer teacher at a private primary school. "But as soon as there was a semblance of calm, we felt it was a moral imperative to get our schools reopened.



Ivorian rebel fighter in the northern town of Korhongo. Fanta Diallo, a mother of seven children, said that she is trying to keep her children off the streets until real peace returns.
Credit: IRIN

"We had to reorganise the social fabric of society," he said. "Children were playing with wooden sticks as guns and they were very much tempted to approach the rebels."

Coulibaly said that free school meals provided by the UN World Food Programme helped to convince most of Bouake's children to attend school. "Most parents were extremely motivated to help us. Leaving their

child at home, they had one more mouth to feed. So these food distributions have really saved us."

---By January 2003, many schools had reopened, although not all the children attended. Coulibaly said he had "lost" two students to the rebellion. One boy ran errands for the rebels until Coulibaly confronted the student's father, who was not aware that his son skipped classes. The boy was reprimanded and eventually returned to the classroom. Another of Coulibaly's best students, however, a 15-year-old girl, has abandoned her studies entirely and serves as bodyguard to one of the rebels. "I consider it a failure that I have not been able to convince her to leave the rebels," he sighed. "But she came from a broken family, and it is those children who are the most vulnerable. They need structure."

Coulibaly said teachers avoided discussing politics in class and would answer students' questions about the conflict only in private. "School should be a place where they can forget about the war," he said.

With presidential elections due in October 2006 and peace talks – including discussions of disarmament – taking place under the supervision of Prime Minister Charles Konan Banny, hopes are high that Cote d'Ivoire may soon be reunited. Already, there are fewer arms on display on the streets of Bouake than at the start of the conflict. The rebels say the town is more or less demilitarised.

"We took most of our weapons off the streets, and we hope that youngsters are able to forget this war situation," said rebel spokesman Sidiki Konate. "Today in Bouake, you no longer have the impression that you're living in a war zone."

However, Fanta Diallo, a mother of seven, said she tries to keep her children off the streets until real peace returns. Pointing to her eldest daughter, who is in her teens and starting to get interested in boys, Diallo said she does not want her or any of her other children to go near the rebels. "When school is out, she has to walk straight home and stay with me," Diallo said, as she pounded yams in her courtyard in one of the town's residential areas. "She is still a minor, and I don't want her hanging around those young men in military gear.

"Even in normal times, when there are no guns, parents should be responsible," Diallo said, wiping the sweat off her brow. "And the heart of a child that sees weapons around them grows harder every day."

DRC: The challenge of demobilising child soldiers

The boy was just 15 years old. He had come to surrender his weapons following a joint offensive against militia in Ituri District by the Congolese army and the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), known as MONUC.

It was not the first time the boy had given up his gun. According to the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reinsertion (CONADER), he was one of 192 children who had been demobilised in October 2005, after attacks by the Congolese national army on militia groups that had refused to disarm.

"I was recruited by force. I couldn't say no," the boy explained.

A senior official at CONADER estimated that as many as 10 percent of demobilised child soldiers in Ituri, a district the northeast of DRC, had returned to the battlefield since the launch of a demobilisation and community reinsertion programme in October 2004, despite the presence of numerous child-protection agencies in the region.

Massimo Nicoletti-Altimari, head of the UN Children's



In DRC tens of thousands of women have been raped at gun point by soldiers, militias, rebels and criminals. In a culture of almost total impunity this 65-70 year old woman was repeatedly raped after her husband was killed in their home in 2005.
Credit: Georgina Cranston/IRIN

said.

Floris Kitoko, a child-protection officer in Ituri for CONADER, said militia prefer to recruit children, who can be easily led. "Children can be drugged, for example, or manipulated. A child under these influences can kill with little difficulty," Kitoko said.

"I killed so many people over the last three years," admitted "Wallace", a former child soldier who now lives on the street. "It was terrible. All my friends are dead now."

Bienvenu Panda, head of child protection for Unicef in Ituri, said children - in particular girls - effectively become the hostages of militants. "Girls become sex slaves, and then the fear of being rejected by society means that they may refuse to demobilise."

Unicef has succeeded so far in demobilising 5,300 of the 6,000 children targeted by the reintegration programme. The children had served the militia as soldiers, porters, spies and cooks, to name but a few roles. "The main part of our programme lies not in the demobilisation process itself, but rather in the successful integration of the children into the community," said Nicoletti-Altimari. This process, he readily admitted, is not easy.

Former child soldiers in the community

In the Lumumba District in the centre of Bunia in northeastern DRC, a vicious fight unfolded. Ten children were relentlessly attacking and beating another child, who struggled in vain to escape the fray. Even though passers-by intervened, the angry mob would not let the other child go. Some even used knives to inflict further injury. One child shouted, "If I had a gun I would kill you!"

It was clear the former child soldiers were not fighting for any particular reason. Sadly, this scene was just one of many playing out around the city. Nicoletti-Altimari acknowledged that it is usually difficult for child soldiers to re-enter community life. To assist in their transition, Unicef and other agencies - including Save the Children, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Cooperazione Internazionale (COOPI) - have established psychosocial support centres, where former child soldiers can stay before returning to their

Fund (Unicef) in Ituri, blamed recidivism on the power vacuum in the district. "If the authority of the state is not felt, interventions are bound to have limited results," he

families or, in some cases, to host families.

Papa Hadji has hosted several former child soldiers. His wife said by and large most children adapted well to life with a pencil, and not a gun, in their hand. "There are some children, however, that will just give up on their lessons for a few days, without any warning. They say they are fed up with teachers acting superior and always going on at them," she said.

Christian Mateso, a close relative of a demobilised 'kadogo' (a local term for child soldier), described the potentially volatile behaviour of the ex-fighters: "If a kadogo thinks he will eat at four o'clock and then finds nothing there for him, he will pelt you with stones without even stopping to think. One guardian was injured in such a manner."

"It is vital that there is much awareness-raising to ease their reintegration," said Panda. With this in mind, Unicef has funded the creation and training of child-protection committees in schools. With the help of local partner NGOs, Unicef can ensure the children are continually monitored in their communities. In addition, the organisation pays the school fees of 1,600 children who have chosen to continue their studies. Twenty percent of this group are classified as "vulnerable" children, and most of them are orphans. Unicef also helps children who do not want to continue their education become involved in income-generating activities. Almost 200 children throughout Ituri benefit from such programmes.

The draw of the battlefield

Papa Hadji's wife told a story about a particularly difficult child they had hosted, who had been the consort of a major rebel leader. "That child lived with us in the day, but at night hung out with militiamen," she said.



In DRC the slow and difficult task of demobilising militias and rebels is underway while fighting still rages. The country is awash with small arms and with them widespread lawlessness.
Credit: David Hecht/IRIN

IRIN had encountered the boy a year ago, scouting out \$30 so he could earn his living selling cigarettes. He had been spotted recently in the doorway of a nightclub at midnight - this time in the midst of a negotiation with a prostitute. All attempts to approach him failed:

he pulled his hat right down over his face, all the while exhaling smoke through his mouth and nose, as if highly experienced in the practice. He certainly didn't want to be seen and disappeared soon afterwards.

A local teacher believed these children were highly vulnerable and would be quick to pick up their guns again if the opportunity presented itself.

A case study

Ex-combatant Claude Rambo, 16, said that if his present suffering continues, he is ready to become a soldier once more. "I enrolled as a volunteer six years ago, after I had lost my parents in interethnic conflict," he said. "I first fought in the Armée du Peuple Congolais (APC), led by Mbusa Nyamwisi, the current Congolese minister of regional cooperation, and then, from 2002, in Thomas Lubanga's Union des Patriotes Congolais."

Rambo left the army of his own free will, choosing in 2003 to continue his studies. "I realised I would never be made major, colonel or general, as I hadn't studied," he said. However, he had recently stopped attending class once again, this time due to lack of money. "I was fine when I was in the army," he said. "I ate when I was hungry; I dressed well. I was spoiled by my commanders."

According to Unicef, a number of children are still outside the reach of reintegration programmes. There are negotiations currently in progress to reintegrate

children over age 16 into their communities as part of the ongoing initiative, which is financed by the UN Development Programme and the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

"The circumstances in Ituri are very particular. Many children are willing to work to earn a living," said Nicoletti-Altamari. "They are already responsible adults, sometimes even parents."

At a training seminar in Mudzi in the north of Bunia along with 44 other children, Rambo expressed how difficult it is for former child soldiers to find their place in the world. "If my life doesn't change, I want to go back to the army," he said, raising his voice. But which army? "It doesn't matter – rebel or government. After all, whether rebel or not, they are all Congolese."

GHANA: Artisan gunsmiths feed demand for illegal weapons



According to Emmanuel Kwasi Aning, a former professor at the University of Ghana who has written extensive papers on the manufacture of small arms in Ghana, there are some 2,500 blacksmiths with gun-making capacity in the central Ashanti and Brong Ahafo regions alone.
Credit: IRIN

scrap metal on his anvil.

Wayo told police he had learned his gun-making skills from his late father, who also engaged in a secretive but thriving sideline for blacksmiths up and down the country. Although porous international borders and cheap, imported semiautomatic weapons are frequently blamed for the proliferation of small arms across West Africa, Ghanaian blacksmiths like Wayo are part of a flourishing industry – and developing a reputation for good-quality weapons that can match the performance of an AK-47 imported from Russia.

Emmanuel Kwasi Aning, a former professor at the University of Ghana, has conducted extensive studies on the manufacture of small arms in Ghana. He said there

Teye Wayo stands, silently abashed, as Ghanaian police officers display the cache of 73 rifles and six pistols the 70-year-old blacksmith has hammered out of

are some 2,500 blacksmiths with gun-making capacity in the central Ashanti and Brong Ahafo regions alone.

A decent traditional hunting rifle can cost as little as US\$4.50, according to Aning's research, while a locally produced semiautomatic machine gun – something like an AK-47 – would cost as much as \$93.

The Ghanaian police are keen to crack down on the internal production of arms, which provides the bulk of guns used in the armed robberies that have become a growing problem in the capital, Accra. "If you take five armed-robbery cases, four – or four-and-a-half – will have used locally manufactured arms," said Rashid Yakubu, of the Foundation for Security and Development in Africa (FOSDA), which works for greater controls of the manufacture and trade in small arms.

Armed gangs are increasingly terrorising wealthier suburbs of Accra, and in some cases the guns are more than a threat. "All of a sudden, I heard pah-pah-pah! We rushed into the house to find Dada lying in a pool of blood. He had his back to the ground and his teeth clenched," explained a tearful Shallotte Quarshie, 48. "He was still holding onto his spectacles and mobile phone," she said, sitting on the front porch of the family home in Accra's Domi Pillar Two quarter. Two blocks away, neighbour Awuah Boateng was also shot dead, along with his wife's niece and two other family

members, by a pistol-wielding burglar.



Smiling at an uncertain future. Armed related incidents have brought heavy tension in the suburbs of Accra.
Credit: IRIN

The incidents have instilled a sense of fear in a neighbourhood where high, razor-wire-topped walls have failed to keep out the gun-toting criminals. To curb the rise in armed crime, the Ghanaian government has repeatedly implemented measures to crack down on the production and circulation of arms.

Nonetheless, there remain some 100,000 illicit weapons in circulation, according to the Ghana National Commission on Small Arms.

Kofi Ametepey, also from FOSDA, said the government needed to take fresh stock of how to deal with the covert gunsmiths, because the clampdowns had done little more than push the gunsmiths further underground. He believed the trade should be regulated and monitored instead of outlawed. "We must give local [gun] producers faith and confidence that we can work together and not arrest them, but legalise them," he said.

The deputy minister of the interior, Nkrabea Effah Dattey, agreed. "I believe the solution lies in regularising the production of small arms. And we must bring all weapons in and licence them so we can control their uses," he said. Dattey, who is also chairman of the Ghana National Commission on Small Arms, said the gunsmiths should be encouraged to use their skills to make other products.

Not every blacksmith in Accra wants to be a gunmaker. Emmanuel Siaw, 37, said he could understand why other blacksmiths were tempted to make guns. "I have a lot of friends who make a lot of money making guns on the side. It's tempting, but it's wrong. I'm not going to get involved in that business, even if it were legal."

Instead, Siaw, sweat beading on his brow, labours longer hours for less money, knocking crumpled car parts back into shape.

KENYA: Illegal small arms fuel ethnic strife and crime



Weapons go up in flames during a ceremony to destroy illegal arms in Nairobi on 29 June 2005. "Easy availability of small arms both nationally and regionally has made crime so violent and this is deterring investment and exacerbating conflicts between communities in border areas," said Peter Erage, coordinator, Kenya National Focal Point on Small Arms and Light Weapons.
Credit: IRIN

Bwire survived because the bullet did not pierce his skull. However, he lost hearing in one ear; his mouth is

now askew; and he is unable to blink one of his eyes. Nearly five months since the attack, he is still taking medication; he will have to endure at least 18 months of physiotherapy before he is able to work again. "My body trembles uncontrollably sometimes," he said.

A senior insurance executive driving to his home on the outskirts of Nairobi in early 2005 was oblivious to a car that was trailing him from a distance. When he stopped in front of the gate to wait for the guard to open it, a gunman emerged from the car behind him and shot him dead, execution style. The motive for the murder was not immediately established.

In January, 69-year-old British filmmaker Joan Root was shot and killed by intruders, who broke into her home near the town of Naivasha in the Kenyan Rift Valley. The assailants stole nothing from the house. Police said they were investigating whether the attack was a bungled burglary attempt or premeditated murder.

These are only three of the numerous crimes committed at gunpoint in Kenya each year, most of which are carried out using illegally held small arms. Such attacks claim the lives of hundreds of Kenyans annually, and the majority of the perpetrators are never

M i l t o n Bwire was a p p r o a c h i n g the gate to his home in the eastern Nairobi suburb of B u r u b u r u when he was a c c o s t e d by a group of young thugs, who tried to rob him. When Bwire called for help, the gangster he was wrestling shot him through the temple and fled.

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brought to justice.

"Easy availability of small arms, both nationally and regionally, has made crime so violent, and this is deterring investment [in Kenya] and exacerbating conflicts between communities in border areas," said Peter Eregae, coordinator of the Kenya National Focal Point on Small Arms and Light Weapons. "Families have lost breadwinners, people have been maimed."

In rural areas, small arms have replaced traditional weapons in ethnic warfare over land, water and live-stock. In one of the most vicious eruptions of conflict in northern Kenya in recent years, more than 70 people were killed in Marsabit District on 12 July 2005, when armed raiders, believed to have been members of the Borana ethnic group, attacked villages inhabited by the Gabra community. Scores were wounded and thousands displaced. The attack underlined the volatility of relationships between communities in arid areas, where pasture and water sources are often limited and rivalry between pastoralists - who are often armed with illegally acquired weapons - is intense.

The use of firearms has risen to alarmingly high levels in Kenya during the past decade, a trend blamed on the easy availability of small arms, mostly pistols and assault rifles. Armed conflicts in the Horn of Africa, especially in Somalia, some parts of Ethiopia and the Great Lakes region, have been cited as one way through which illegal guns have fallen into the hands of gangsters and livestock thieves.

Eregae said most of the weapons used in urban crime, cattle rustling and poaching were smuggled into Kenya from neighbouring countries that have experienced civil strife. According to a source within the Kenyan law enforcement, an illegal pistol would sell in some Nairobi suburbs for about 10,000 shillings (US\$140). Larger weapons, such as AK-47s, which are not readily available from smugglers in the city, would cost three times more.

There have also been rumours of police officers renting out their guns to criminals. Although he did not rule it out completely, the source said, "Only a very foolish policeman would do that."

A Human Rights Watch (HRW) report in 2002 on the proliferation of small arms in Kenya found that some weapons had originated from places as far away as China and the United States. Most arms had circulated through war zones in neighbouring countries before making their way to Kenya's illegal gun markets. The report also observed that the spread of sophisticated weapons among communities had intensified conflict and blurred the line between longstanding ethnic competition, that had traditionally manifested in cattle theft or rustling, and political violence.

The resort to the use of already available small arms in some parts of the country affected by insecurity is sometimes triggered by rivalry between politicians who have been blamed of inciting their supporters to

attack other groups for selfish political motives.

"The increased presence of modern weapons facilitates the ability of opportunists in the Kenyan political arena to instigate armed violence for political gain. Similarly, the spread of sophisticated weapons makes it easier for groups under attack to arm themselves in what they portray as self-defence," the report said.

To deal with the proliferation of small arms in Kenya, the government is working on a national weapons-management policy. "The main objective is to eradicate illegally available small arms through strict control measures," said Eregae, adding that the policy is expected to be ready by July and would be used as the basis for new arms-control legislation.

Provisions in the draft policy include marking, to ensure state and privately owned firearms can be traced; amnesty for voluntarily surrendered guns; and social services for communities that perceive arms to be the only way to ensure access to resources.



Northwestern Kenya. Turkana children outside Kakuma refugee camp. The spread of weapons among communities has intensified conflict and blurred the line between long-standing ethnic competition-traditionally manifested in cattle theft or rustling and political violence. Credit: IRIN

"All arms coming into the state will be marked to facilitate tracing. Anything that is not marked will be considered illicit. Even the weapons that are already here [state-owned firearms] will be marked to identify manufacturer, seller and end user," Eregae said.

The policy also would take into account that the desire for guns was the result of communities feeling marginalised. "Underdevelopment is part of the problem. There is too much poverty among communities in remote areas," said Eregae, adding that the government was addressing the issue of marginalisation by drilling boreholes, building schools and health centres as well as providing school meals in areas where amnesty has been declared for people who voluntarily surrender their arms.

Mikewa Ogada of the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC), however, said the implementation of the draft policy would only succeed with public support. "The policy is fine, but there seems to be a lack of appreciation that greater public awareness is needed. They [the government] seem to be working in a vacuum," he said. The KHRC had shared its concerns with the government.

In April 2005, the Kenyan government started an exercise to collect firearms voluntarily surrendered by communities in the northern Rift Valley districts of Pokot, Turkana, Marakwet, Samburu, Trans-Nzoia and Laikipia - areas where interethnic violence, mostly prompted by cattle rustling and rivalry over water and pasture, had claimed the lives of hundreds of people during the past decade. So far, some 2,300 firearms

and 5,000 rounds of ammunition have been surrendered in the six districts, a paltry figure considering that people in these areas hold an estimated 50,000 illegally acquired firearms. Still, Eregae saw the exercise as a major success. "This is the first time we have collected that number of weapons," he said, adding that public awareness and persuasion by local elders, religious groups and civil society were paying dividends in the disarmament exercise. "Previously, the government used force [to seize arms] - but that will never succeed."

Kenya is also a signatory to the Nairobi Declaration on the Problem of the Proliferation of Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa, which was launched as the Nairobi Protocol in 2000. On 21 June 2005, signatories to the

declaration agreed to set up a centre on small arms to combat the proliferation and use of illicit light weapons and strengthen cooperation in the region. The Regional Centre on Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa (RECSA) is based in Nairobi. Signatories to the protocol include Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sudan, Uganda and Tanzania.

NIGERIA: Widespread availability of small arms a major security issue



One of several photos distributed by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), a militant group claiming to fight for local control of the region's oil wealth. Photo is apparently of MEND militants and foreign oil workers they recently took hostage. The widespread availability of small arms and light weapons has helped stoke a decade of unrest in the region.

attacks on oil installations and fighting among rival militias.

Attacks on oil installations and hostage-takings staged in the Niger Delta since January by a previously unknown Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), have halved the Nigerian output of oil giant Royal Dutch Shell and cut 20 percent of the country's daily exports of 2.5 million barrels. It has helped sustain the pressure on world oil prices, now at new historical highs of US\$70 a barrel.

MEND claims to be fighting for the interests of the impoverished inhabitants of the oil region, who want a greater share of the oil revenues forming the mainstay of Nigeria's economy. However, its demands include the release of Mujahid Dokubo-Asari, leader of the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) who was arrested by the authorities in September 2005 and is now facing charges of treason.

The widespread availability of small arms and light weapons has helped stoke a decade of unrest in the region that

produces

nearly all of Nigeria's oil, which is rife with

hostage-taking,

Security experts in Nigeria concede that MEND has grown out of the same system of militia forces the restive delta has spawned over the years, all dependent on an international criminal network trading in illegal arms and crude oil stolen from pipelines in the swamps and creeks of the region. "It is the same groups of fighters who had attacked for ransom in the past and tapped oil from pipelines," said a senior Nigerian security official with briefs in the oil industry. "But now there is an attempt to build a political cause."

According to a 2003 international consultancy study financed by Royal Dutch Shell, which runs the biggest operation of any of the transnational oil companies in Nigeria, violence in the delta claimed an average of 1,000 lives each year. The study predicted that Shell might be forced to end onshore oil production in Nigeria by 2008 unless the issues underlying the region's violence were addressed. It is possible that the recent attacks and kidnappings targeting mainly Shell operations have even further hastened the process. Shell has been forced to close down its entire onshore operations in the western Niger Delta, shutting down the Forcados oil export terminal, one of its two main export terminals in Nigeria.

According to Babafemi Ojuda, a researcher who has investigated the small-arms trade in the country, the Niger Delta has long had easy access to small weapons, but growing violence and militarisation in the region has been a boost to the trade in recent years. He said smugglers operating out of Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Cameroon and Nigeria have always coordinated the trade. "Using fast boats, these smugglers cruise to ships in the high seas and obtain guns, the origins of which may be as far afield as Eastern Europe and Asia," said Ojuda.

Dokubo-Asari told IRIN in 2005 that Nigeria's Atlantic waters were indeed the main channel through which his militia obtained weapons. "We are very close to international waters, and it's very easy to get weapons from ships," he said in the interview. "We have AK-47s, general-purpose machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades."



Ijaw militants loyal to Dokubo Asari display their guns and magic charms in Okoronta village in the Niger Delta in July 2004.
Credit: George Osodi/IRIN

Government and oil industry officials say groups like Dokubo's NDPVF and MEND, which have popped up in the region in recent years, fund their weapons purchases by tapping crude oil from pipelines into barges for illegal sale to tankers waiting offshore. Nigeria was estimated at one time to be losing

as much as 10 percent of its daily oil exports through such thefts, which are locally known as bunkering.

While the Niger Delta may be Nigeria's biggest small-arms problem, it is not the only one. Nationwide, the illegal circulation of small arms, sent in by smugglers across the land borders of the neighbouring countries of Benin, Niger, Chad and Cameroon, has had an impact not only on widespread armed banditry but also on ethnic and religious violence that have claimed more than 10,000 lives since 1999.

Another key arms-smuggling route into Nigeria is the Lagos-Benin coastal axis extending across West Africa as far as Liberia and Sierra Leone. In November 2003, customs officials intercepted a lorry carrying 170,000 rounds of ammunition concealed in a cargo of charcoal that had crossed the border from Benin into Nigeria. It was pronounced one of the biggest hauls ever in Nigeria.

An equally worrisome source of weapons is Nigeria's northern borders with Chad and Niger. Nigerian security agencies say remnants of rebel wars in both countries have drifted southwards with their weapons into Nigeria over the past decade. Operating in large bands of 30 to 50 armed men, they engage in banditry on highways in northeast and central Nigeria. "They are even hired as mercenaries to fight in land disputes or in communal or religious conflicts in the area," said a Nigerian army intelligence official.

Many experts say Nigeria's problems with small arms and light weapons date back to the country's 1967-1970 civil war, during which the southeast made a failed attempt to secede.

"Many of the small arms used in that war, especially on the rebel Biafran side, weren't mopped up at the end of hostilities," said Patrick Oraeke, a security consultant. He said the war created a generation of people who had trained in the use of weapons but were not under the discipline and control of any of the armed forces.

As a result, they easily resorted to banditry. "The surge in armed robberies and violent crimes in Nigeria that followed the civil war is yet to abate," he added.

There is evidence, too, that arms flowed into Nigeria as a result of the civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia, where Nigerian soldiers were involved in peacekeeping missions. Both smugglers and soldiers brought in weapons from those conflicts. In one known case, a soldier testifying as a prosecution witness in one of several political-assassination cases recorded under the late military ruler General Sani Abacha, told a court he was given an AK-47 rifle brought in from Liberia by his superiors to use in the assassination attempt on a perceived opponent of Abacha. The would-be assassins had reasoned that the weapon would be harder to trace since it was not registered in the official armoury, said prosecution witness Sgt Barnabas Mshelia.

Three years after leaders of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) declared a moratorium on the manufacture, import and export of small arms in 1998, Nigeria set up a special committee with members drawn from the armed forces and security agencies to coordinate efforts to mop up small arms and light weapons in the country. More than 8,000 small arms recovered following the ECOWAS moratorium were destroyed in July 2001. Equally large numbers have subsequently been reclaimed, with two militia groups in the Niger Delta surrendering more than 3,500 guns in 2004.

In his address to the United Nations General Assembly on 17 September 2005, President Olusegun Obasanjo stressed the need for "a legally binding international instrument that will regulate, control and monitor the illicit trade in small arms, including their transfer to non-state actors." He said the agreement reached in June 2005 by the UN on the identification and tracing of illicit weapons would only serve as a temporary measure.

"The availability and wide circulation of small arms and light weapons pose the greatest danger to peace and security, especially in our region," Obasanjo said. "These weapons have helped to prolong conflicts, undermined stability, social peace and security and have wrought devastation on the economies of affected states."

ROC: Small arms continue to threaten political transition and national stability



An arms pyre in Brazzaville, capital of Republic of Congo before it was set alight by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Republic of Congo President Denis Sassou-Nguesso in March 2006.
Credit: Laudes Martial Mbon/IRIN

civil war.

At the end of March, a senior official warned that the southern region of Pool might be excluded from legislative elections in 2007 due to the profusion of weapons in circulation. Small arms are a serious problem in the region, with humanitarian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reporting regular incidents of rape and robbery. While the situation in Pool is especially acute, the announcement by Marius Mouambenga, the head of the committee created to supervise the peace process in Pool, called attention to the widespread availability of illegal weapons elsewhere in the country. A report published by the NGO Small Arms International at the beginning of 2006 revealed that 34,000 arms are still being held illegally on Congolese soil.

Guns flooded the country during the years of conflict. Pool was one of the areas worst hit, with violent confrontations lasting from 1998 to 2002. Fighting was also particularly severe nationwide from June to October 1997, with 10,000 deaths in the capital city of Brazzaville alone. While hostilities are nominally over - and a shaky peace agreement between the government and the leader of the Ninja rebel movement, Frederic Bitsangou, also known as Pastor Ntoumi, was signed in Pool in March 2003 - the climate of insecurity has increased the circulation of arms in the country and encouraged civilians to procure arms to defend themselves.

Illegal firearms still constitute a significant threat in the Republic of Congo (ROC), despite efforts by the government to reduce the number of arms in circulation following nearly a decade of

A drive to address the problem and destroy the arsenal available in ROC was launched by the government in January 2001. Several hundred firearms of different types were incinerated in a massive weapons pyre in Brazzaville. A second pyre was constructed on 15 September 2005, also in the capital. Arms were collected from ex-combatants in the Pool region, as part of the demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) process. Among the 507 firearms destroyed were 104 Kalashnikovs; 3,682 pieces of ammunition also went up in flames.

These weapons had been handed over to the authorities voluntarily by 450 former soldiers who were once loyal to Pastor Ntoumi. In return, the ex-combatants received medical and psychological care; instruction in civics and moral education; and accelerated vocational training, designed to help them establish successful income-generating microfinance projects.

Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, lit a third pyre of weapons on 20 March 2006, when passing through Brazzaville. The arsenal consisted of 80,000 pieces of ammunition, 500 weapons and 800 grenades. Authorities had collected the weapons from 800 civilians and former soldiers between December 2005 and March 2006 as part of a programme to exchange guns for development aid. The European Union (EU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) provided the necessary technical and financial assistance for the operation.

"Peace, security and stability are the necessary conditions if there is to be long-term development that benefits everyone. [...] Let peace spring from the ashes of these weapons," Annan said before setting light to the pyre.

SOUTH AFRICA: Gun crime continues to devastate lives



In South Africa, fire arms related fatalities outnumber deaths from car accidents and are the leading cause non-natural deaths and of all deaths among 15- to 21-year-old males.
Credit: Brent Stirton/OCHA

Seven years ago, Pam Crowesly's twin brother was fatally shot at his workplace. The suspected perpetrator was a disgruntled former employee, but there

were no witnesses. Little police investigation and no prosecution followed.

Six years later, Crowesly's 16-year-old son, Daniel, also became a gun victim when his best friend accidentally shot him with a weapon he had borrowed from his father. The father was banned from owning a gun for a five-year period but received no further penalties for handing a loaded firearm to a minor.

Although one death was deliberate and the other accidental, Crowesly identified guns as the common factor. Her family may have suffered more than its share of tragedy as a result of gun violence, but their case is far from unusual in a country where firearm fatalities outnumber deaths from car accidents. In South Africa, shootings are the leading cause of non-natural deaths in the general population, and the leading cause of death, both natural and non-natural, among 15- to 21-year-old males. Every day, newspapers feature grisly accounts of four-year-olds accidentally shooting four-year-olds, of husbands shooting wives or of bank robbers storming shopping malls with AK-47 assault rifles.

"Firearms have had really devastating consequences in South Africa," said Judy Bassingthwaighe, national director of Gun-Free South Africa, a gun-control lobby group that Crowesly recently joined. "We all know someone who's been hijacked at gunpoint. Breadwinners are being killed, and gun violence is stealing precious resources from economic and social development."

A recent report, commissioned by Oxfam and carried out by Gun-Free, documented how the political violence of the 1980s and early 1990s gave way to a growth in criminal violence after the 1994 all-race elections. Many people, especially white South Africans, responded to the crime wave by arming themselves, with no legal limits on how many guns they could own. The country is now awash with 3.7 million legally registered firearms and an unknown - but by some estimates even larger - pool of illegal guns. According to the report, more than 100,000 people lost their lives in gun-related violence in the first 10 years of South Africa's democratic transformation.

The country's international notoriety for violent crime has had a damaging impact on foreign investment; resources urgently needed to develop the country's underfunded health and education sectors have been spent instead on safety and security measures. The latest and most comprehensive of those measures is the Firearms Control Act, passed in 2000 but only in its second year of implementation. The new legislation places strict controls on gun sales and ownership and replaces outdated apartheid-era laws that did little to prevent the proliferation of guns.

Had Daniel Crowesly's death occurred two months later, his friend's father could have been prosecuted under the new law, which prohibits lending a gun without supervision and rises the minimum age for owning a weapon from 16 to 21. The new gun law also limits individuals to one handgun for self-defence and a maximum of three additional firearms for hunting and sport shooting. Would-be gun owners must justify their need for a weapon and undergo competency training and background checks, which prohibit anyone with a history of substance abuse or violent crime from owning a gun. Current gun owners are required to hand over excess guns and renew their licenses under the new law.

Crowesly welcomed the new law as "fantastic", but groups as ideologically opposed as Gun-Free and the South African Gun Owners' Association (SAGA) have pointed out that potential problems with the legislation lie in its implementation. "It's well-intentioned from a control point of view, but the intentions can't be translated into reality," said SAGA spokesman Martin Hood. "There are major shortcomings in terms of the ability to implement the act."

The police are in their second year of a five-year plan to stagger the monumental re-licensing task. According to deadlines, which have been determined by date of birth, owners with birthdays falling between January and March had to renew their licenses by the end of 2005. SAGA estimated that 600,000 renewals must be processed per year if the police are to avoid backlogs, but the police dispute this figure, saying that an unknown number of gun owners may still decide to hand over or sell their weapons rather than renew their licenses.

According to police spokesman Phuti Setati, 6,000 renewal applications are currently being processed and, contrary to claims by SAGA, those whose applications were not completed by the end of 2005 would not be prosecuted for illegal possession. Meanwhile, applications for new gun licenses are taking months to process. In response to concerns that many gun owners are not even aware of the new requirements, Setati said the police service had been distributing pamphlets and holding road shows and public meetings in every province. He refused to comment on what percentage of the new applications had been approved.



According to officials, large number of illegal weapons can be traced to badly secured, military armories and the sale of guns by corrupt police officers.

Credit: www.marekinc.com

Bassingthwaighte described the licensing backlog as “growing pains”, but conceded that the police could have been better organised and done more to inform gun owners about the new regulations. Noel Stott, senior researcher at the Institute for Security Studies’ Arms Management Programme, reasoned that the new act demands a lot more from the police than the old legislation and that it would take time to phase in. “It’s an

incredibly comprehensive act, and they’ve had to put a lot of structures and personnel in place. We know the police are undercapacitated,” he explained.

The main criticism of the pro-gun lobby is that the focus of the legislation on law-abiding gun owners is misplaced. “They’re devoting a great deal of time and energy to policing legal firearm owners and not criminals. People are entitled to defend themselves when there are very high levels of crime,” said Hood, the SAGA spokesman.

During the 1990s, large numbers of guns found their way into South Africa from war zones in Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola. However, it is generally agreed that the majority of illegal firearms used in crimes today originated in South Africa, but that is where consensus ends.

Hood cited large numbers of illegal weapons that could be traced to badly secured police and military armories and the sale of guns by corrupt police officers. However, the Gun-Free lobby supported the police’s assertion that the majority of illegal arms used in crimes began as legal guns that were lost or stolen from civilian owners. According to statistics in the Gun-Free report, an average of 66 guns were reported lost or stolen in South Africa everyday between 1995 and 2003.

“The gun lobby says they’re the law-abiding citizens, but then why do we have so many lost firearms?” Bassingthwaighte asked. She and Crowesly were hopeful that the new legislation, which includes strict rules for the safe storage of firearms, would force gun owners to be more responsible.

During a six-month amnesty on illegal guns, which ended in June 2005, the police collected close to 100,000 firearms. Abios Khele of the Black Gun Owners’ Association of South Africa believed many

more guns would have been handed in had the police offered compensation and had the amnesty not been conditional on linking guns to crimes through ballistic testing.

Khele founded the Black Gun Owners Association based on his experience working in a gun shop and seeing license applications by black people continually turned down. He became convinced that the new law was a deliberate ploy to disarm the black masses as they became increasingly frustrated by the government’s slow delivery on election promises of more jobs, housing and services. Claiming that none of its 20,000 members have managed to secure a gun license under the new law, the association is now suing the government for 3.2 billion rand (US \$516 million) in losses and damages.

Khele saw his members’ fight as distinct from that of the white gun lobby. “White people want more firearms for sport, and black people only want one gun for self-defence,” he said. “In our townships, it is not safe at all, especially for people who are taking early transport to work, when it’s still dark and they’re walking a long distance. A white man in Sandton [a predominantly white suburb] - he’s got an electric fence, high walls and a garage for his car.”

The lack of police presence in townships and the difficulty and expense of acquiring a gun legally will see more and more black people buying illegal guns and “taking the law into their own hands,” warned Khele. “Those people are sick and tired of crime, and they have no other way of dealing with the situation.”

Crowesly and other supporters of the new gun law were also frustrated by high crime rates and an under-resourced police service, but they believed the answer lay in fewer, not more, guns in circulation. “Even if my brother had had a gun, in that situation he never would have been able to defend himself,” she said. “I know many people own guns for self-defence, but I honestly believe that if people know you’ve got a gun, you are a target.”

UGANDA: The rule of the gun in Karamoja



A group of young children peer through a bullet hole in the wall of a derelict building in Patongo internally displaced people's (IDP) camp in Pader District, northern Uganda. The camp is home to over 40,000 people displaced by the near two decade long rebellion against the Ugandan government by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).
Credit: Stuart Price/IRIN

by Arab and Ethiopian traders at the turn of the last century.

"According to the information we have gathered, guns were introduced to Karamoja 16 years after Uganda was declared a British protectorate in 1894, as the pastoralists endeavoured to spur their ivory trade and fight off hostile neighbours," said Peter Otim, a researcher with Uganda's Centre for Basic Research. Arab and Ethiopian traders encouraged the Karamojong to kill elephants for ivory, which they exchanged for beads. "The traders introduced guns to facilitate the ivory trade, but the Karamojong also used the opportunity to use the weapons for self-defence and improve their cattle raids."

Procuring guns through the ivory trade strengthened the group's efforts to remain outside colonial control. "They developed self-defence mechanisms and loathed anything resembling government in the region," Otim said.

A British colonial army officer was dumbfounded to find naked people with guns roaming the plains of Uganda's northeastern region of Karamoja. The officer was on a journey to southern Sudan, and as his group passed through Karamoja it came under gunfire and just managed to evade the ambush, Otim recounted.



A fighting vehicle of the Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF) passes through a camp for internally displaced people (IDP) in Kitgum District, northern Uganda. The many camps across the region are home to over 1.5 million people displaced by the near two decade long rebellion against the Ugandan government by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).
Credit: Stuart Price/IRIN

The colonial administrators deployed to Karamoja enforced relocations, in an attempt to break community alliances. They also tried

The history of arms in Uganda's northeastern region of Karamoja is as long as Uganda's colonial history, with researchers estimating that the gun was introduced to the region

to impose their rule of law, including the introduction of taxes. All this further alienated the Karamojong, who rejected any colonial government policies, especially those conveyed via youths, who were used as messengers. "This was contrary to the Karamojong tradition of respecting elders, and many of the youths were captured and executed, accused of being agents of the 'enemy,'" Otim said.

In colonial times, the number of guns in Karamoja – and the desire to acquire them – was relatively low. This changed post-independence, when the government of Milton Obote used force to quell lawlessness in the region. This did not eradicate armed violence, Otim said, but made it a casual and a daily occurrence.

Deadly clashes commonplace

The government was not the Karamojong's only adversary. Interclan rivalry and clashes with other communities have always been a vital part of Karamojong culture. Warriors frequently engaged in cattle rustling against rival communities and neighbouring ethnic groups in a bid to increase the size of their livestock herds. Local livelihoods largely revolve around cattle, with the animals' meat, milk and hides serving as the backbone of the economy. Bride price for a Karamojong girl can be as high as 100 cows.

Before acquiring guns, warriors used bows and arrows and other rudimentary weapons. However, as guns became available in the region the Karamojong began to amass large stocks of weapons and ammunition. Battles became more lethal as the cattle-keepers modernised their armoury. Today, Karamoja is the scene of violent gun battles that often leave hundreds of warriors dead. Some 163 deaths in interclan clashes were recorded in a four-month period in 2005.

As the neighbouring Toposa and Didinga in Sudan and Turkana in Kenya increasingly gained strength in the post-colonial period, the Karamojong became the most vulnerable target in the region. The lack of government protection led them to acquire more weapons as the only means to defend themselves against their neighbours.

"The Karamojong started manufacturing their own guns, calling them amatida, and this was a great innovation for them. They made small alliances for gun powder with small groups of the rival tribes across the border," Otim said, adding that the Karamojong offered grazing rights to induce other groups to ally with them.

The Karamojong also dismantled boreholes that the government had installed in the region to use the pipes as raw material to manufacture arms.

The Karamojong arsenal grew in 1979, when a combined force of Ugandan exiles and the Tanzanian army

overthrew then-President Idi Amin. A young herder discovered that soldiers had abandoned the barracks of the First Gonda Regiment in Karamoja's Moroto district, leaving automatic rifles and other arms and ammunitions unattended. "This changed the defence capacity of the Karamojong drastically - that they could attack their rivals with ease - but this also triggered off interclan clashes," Otim said.

Deadly attacks escalated and cattle raids that were reserved for rival neighbours in Kenya and Sudan started targeting sub-tribes in Karamoja, such as the Mathenikos. "Currently, no less than 150 people are killed every four months," Otim said.

At one time, the government of current President Yoweri Museveni allowed the cattle keepers to have guns to defend themselves against cattle raids. This made gun trading so widespread that bullets were sold like beans in market stalls. However, by the late 1990s, cattle raids became so violent - with more than 600 deaths recorded in a single battle - the government decided to disarm the pastoralists. The exercise began successfully, with more than 3,000 guns surrendered to Museveni himself on the first day of voluntary disarmament in December 2001. However, to this day, about 10,000 of an estimated 50,000 guns in circulation have been recovered.



Former abductees at the Kichwa Rehabilitation Centre. The proliferation of small arms has caused wide spread instability in the region.
Credit: Sven Torfinn/IRIN

"The government had promised protection to the Karamojong, and the disarmament was done through persuasion and not by force. But the government failed on its part, which left the Karamojong defenceless. Their rivals had a field day taking away most of their cows, which has further aggravated their poverty status," Otim said.

Robert Locap, a Karamojong in Moroto, said this was the only time the community had ever trusted the government. "But they were let down that many lost all their wealth, and now they are very poor," he said. "It is going to take a lot of effort to reconvince them to disarm."

There is a notion in Karamoja that to keep livestock, one must be heavily armed, Otim said. "I look at the restoration of security in Karamoja as not only a military strategy, but an approach that introduces alternatives that can divert people's reliance on livestock for survival," he said.

New disarmament efforts

A comprehensive disarmament programme has been developed by the government and the regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), according to Richard Nabudere, head of the Government's National Focal Point on small arms. The new strategy would address both the proliferation of arms and the dynamics that have created their demand.

"The comprehensive disarmament programme aims not only at arms collection. If you remove the guns and leave the factors that created demand, the guns will find their way back in," Nabudere said. Issues like poverty would have to be addressed, because the desire to acquire wealth triggered the demand for guns. Karamoja is Uganda's most underdeveloped region, and the programme would also address viable sources of livelihood in the harsh environment that is Karamoja and ensure that people have access to pasture and markets.

"It is a complex set of circumstances. We also need to look at governance, as this is inadequate. We also need to look at external threats, because unless we address those threats, the demand for guns will remain," he said. The programme would also offer incentives for disarmament, like ox-ploughs and food.

"We need to discuss these incentives with the people. We need to empower the traditional systems by making their position meaningful. Development has to be tied to disarmament, and we are trying to create harmony among the rival clans," he said.

For the programme to be successful, neighbouring countries would have to carry out similar, coordinated disarmament programmes. "This will reduce impunity, and we think it can be more effective," Nabudere said. "We can only address the porosity of the border through interstate cooperation, because unless the borders are secured, the arms will continue to flow into the area."

AFGHANISTAN: Where the rule by the gun continues



Afghan women walking by the remains of an old tank. Today, the roads of Panjshir are littered with the rusting hulls of Soviet military equipment.

Abdullah Shah, 25, busily sews clothes in his small tailor's shop in Obdarra, a village in Anaba district in Afghanistan's Panjshir Valley, some 120 km north of the capital, Kabul. He has been the sole breadwinner in his family since his brother, Shafiqullah, was gunned down by a powerful warlord in late 2003. A slaying typical of an environment where local strong men still hold sway over local communities and often deliver ruthless punishment to those that displease them.

"The enemy made tens of holes in the chest of my beloved brother Shafiqullah, just close to the door of our house," Shah said. His brother's murderer was never brought to justice. "The government has failed to bring the killer to court because he's a wealthy man with his own militia," he said.

Panjshir was one of the most militarised parts of the country during the Soviet occupation and the bloody internecine civil war that followed their withdrawal in 1989. Today, the roads remain littered with the rusting hulls of Soviet tanks and other obsolete weapons. Despite countrywide disarmament efforts by the government and the international community, many former gunmen armed with AK-47s still move about freely in the valley, a stark reminder that disarmament has not been fully achieved and that the rule of law has yet to replace the rule of the gun.

Hundreds of thousands of Afghans died in almost three decades of civil war from 1979, up to and during the rule of the Taliban between 1995 and 2001 when the US and coalition forces with the Northern Alliance (NA), drove them out. Although the large numbers of deaths associated with the nation's various internal conflicts are now a thing of the past, illegal killings continue today.

Afghanistan's mountainous terrain and poor infrastructure mean many remote areas of the country are totally outside the government's control. In addition, the country's police and military remain weak and are largely unable to offer security to civilians outside a few major towns.

"Many people feel obliged to keep guns for their personal safety because of a lack of security", said Abdul Hamid Mubarez, former deputy minister of information and culture.

Afghanistan has long had a reputation through its history of being an ungovernable land of warring tribes

where local power struggles and customary or traditional law was maintained by village courts and the use of guns. There is little evidence that the present conditions are very different. Even before the Soviet invasion in 1979, people kept guns in their homes to protect themselves against clan and tribal disputes, as well as general banditry, and to help the government maintain stability.

Following the invasion and the subsequent ten years of brutal conflict, however, the number of arms held among the general population rose because of the many thousands of small and heavy weapons that had entered the country during the fighting. As a result, a substantial number of local, powerful commanders with hundreds of militia members, came into being to fight the communist government and the Soviet super-power military machine as it escalated its presence in the country. They were lavishly supported overtly and covertly by the US and other western powers during what was still the Cold War period.

"Hundreds of illegal armed groups affiliated to various tribal, ethnic and political parties with separate military organisations stored huge amounts of weapons," Mubarez said, impeding the government's efforts to establish national security.

Local analyst Habibullah Rafi said the culture of bearing arms in Afghanistan is related to the country's history and geographic location. Afghanistan was strategically situated along the so-called Silk Road, which linked Asia to Europe and had been constantly attacked over the centuries. "The history of conflict, combined with weak governments and strong local loyalties, has led to a culture where guns are perceived to be as necessary as a cooking pot or a mule," he explained.

There are currently at least 100,000 illegal weapons in Afghanistan, facilitating conflict and undermining the fragile democracy, according to Ahmad Jan Nawzadi, a public information officer for the United Nations-backed national demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) programme. "The government's patience is about to come to an end," he warned. "Those still holding weapons in their houses should know that their arms will definitely be collected."

"Guns are the root cause of all miseries in the country," said 55-year-old Ali-Mardan, an elder in one village in Panjshir. He believes people should show good faith and give up their guns now that the country had a central government.

---Despite government efforts for countrywide disarmament and stronger security forces, people are still reluctant to hand over their weapons. Mohammad Hashim, 27, who lives in Charikar, the capital of the northern Parwan Province, around 50 km north of Kabul, said people did not trust the government's current security forces. "People are maintaining their

security by themselves," he said.

Northern Alliance (NA) forces formed huge military compounds in the Panjshir Valley during the war against the Taliban. Since the ouster of the Taliban government in late 2001, the DDR process in Parwan and Panjshir provinces has led to the collection of more than 7,100 heavy weapons and small arms. Despite this success, however, small arms are still widespread in the valley.



Disarmament has been proceeding in Afghanistan, but in the Panjshir valley, every male seems to brandish at least one gun.
Credit: Sultan Massoodi/IRIN

"It's a sad reality that the majority of people are holding small arms in their houses. It needs strong government intervention to change this," said Abdurrahman, a 23-year-old ex-combatant living in the Bazarak area of Panjshir. He was only 15 when he took up a weapon. "The gun has destroyed my life.

It made me illiterate - with war there was no school, nothing but fighting," he said. Abdurrahman admitted he was still holding two AK-47 rifles at his house, but "only to protect myself from the possible threat of warlords".

Vikram Bhatia, a protection officer with the DDR programme, warned that one way or another, people would surrender their weapons. "If the local commanders and those holding illegal weapons do not surrender their arms voluntarily, there will be a forced disarmament, in which government, coalition and NATO-led peacekeeping forces would collect their weapons," he said.

Officials of the Disarmament and Reintegration Commission (DRC) estimated in late 2005 that there were still between 1,800 and 2,000 illegal armed groups threatening stability across Afghanistan. The long, porous borders and poor law enforcement make the acquisition of new weapons easy, much of which is bankrolled by the country's burgeoning opium trade. "Only strict laws banning unauthorised holding of weapons and border controls can prevent small arms proliferation in Afghanistan," Bhatia said. Opium production has soared since 2001 and the ouster of the Taliban. The 2006 crop is estimated to be the highest yet and with this growth of the illegal drug comes ever-more criminality and use of small arms to maintain and control the trade, UNODC has said.

According to local analyst Qasim Akhgar, small arms are a much more significant threat to the country's stability than heavy weapons, the majority of which have been collected or decommissioned. "To ensure long-term success, only a big national project for both counter-narcotics and disarmament should take place. These will only succeed if people benefit from them - like provision of alternative livelihoods," he said, adding that solving the problem of small arms

would require addressing the problems of poverty and unemployment as well.

Akhgar believed a substantial number of commanders who had joined the DDR process, which was launched on 24 October 2003, had actually surrendered only a small number of non-operational weapons. "Local warlords are still holding stocks of small and heavy weapons in their houses," he said.

However, Masoum Stanekzai, a government minister and deputy head of the disarmament commission, said significant progress had been made in disarming militias. "Generally, it is not true that a considerable number of commanders have only surrendered their non-operational weapons, because our officials have been overseeing the process regularly," he said. "We have received an official document from each of the commanders that they would surrender their arms. If they violate their commitment, the government would definitely use force to disarm them."

In 2003, as part of the effort to reform the security sector in Afghanistan, the government launched Afghanistan's New Beginnings Programme (ANBP), a donor-funded programme of the UN Development Programme (UNDP). Mowlana Abdul Rahman Saidkhel, police chief of the northern Parwan province and a former militia commander, voluntarily surrendered 119 weapons, including six heavy weapons, to the ANBP collection teams.

More than 60,000 former combatants had been disarmed and reintegrated under the DDR initiative, which took the international community almost 20 months and more than US \$150 million to complete. In addition to decommissioning ex-combatants, approximately 24,300 light and medium weapons and 12,200 heavy weapons were collected across the country.



Afghan villagers. According to local analyst Qasim Akhgar, small arms are much more significant threat to the country's stability than heavy weapons.
Credit: UNDP

While trying to deal with the disarmament of Afghan private and localised militias, the Afghan government and the UN are now focusing on the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) initiative, which was officially launched on 11 June 2005 and designed to collect arms from individuals

and groups that hold arms illegally. Financed by the Japanese government, DIAG is run by the interior and defence ministries and the national security agency and overseen by the UN. According to the disarmament commission, that more than 20,000 arms have been collected since the programme began.

The hope is that only those with permits issued by the interior ministry would be allowed to bear arms. "Government takes the issue of keeping illegal arms

seriously. The process of issuing arm permits has just started," Stanekzai said, adding they have already issued permits to allow some people to carry fire-arms.

For the present, however, with the country-wide proliferation of opium production, armed factions infiltrating the country from Pakistan and the inability of the fledgling government to achieve the rule of law, the vision of a gun-free Afghanistan remains as elusive as ever.

KYRGYZSTAN: Small arms proliferation on the rise



Media reports in Kyrgyzstan suggest that as a consequence the rapid spread of small arms crime levels are on the rise in the country. Credit: SABNews.com

The rapid spread of small arms in Kyrgyzstan has become a growing concern for government officials and law enforcement agencies responsible for combat-

ing rising crime in the Central Asian state. was discovered by the police in the backyard of a private house in the southern town of Uzgen, some 60 km north of Osh, in March.

Bakyt Bekibaev, head of the provincial department of the National Security Service (NSS), said the arms had been seized following a special operation carried out by local police and special forces in Osh and Uzgen. The security forces searched houses of local young people whom law enforcement bodies suspected of assisting the Islamic Movement of Turkestan (IMT), formerly known as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and listed by the United States State Department as a terrorist organisation. The group's aim is to overthrow secular governments in the region and establish an Islamic state.

The IMU has made several armed incursions into southern Kyrgyzstan in 1999-2000, taking hostages and clashing with the Kyrgyz security forces.

According to the most recent report on small arms proliferation by the interior ministry, more than 1,200 small arms were seized by law-enforcement agencies in 2005, a 50 percent increase compared with 2004, police analysts explained.

Civil society activists are also concerned that small arms are on the rise in the country. "One can judge the scale of the problem by the fact that a large arsenal of weapons and ammunition was found last autumn in a 'closed', strictly guarded facility: a high-security prison," said Adiljan Abidov, deputy head of the Civil Initiatives Support Centre Public Fund, based in Osh.

An official at the governor's office who declined to be identified said the problem of small-arms proliferation was fuelled by criminal groups, alleged terrorist organisations and drug traffickers.

Abdakarimov agreed. "Smuggled arms have become the main weapon in the hands of local criminals and terrorist groups with external connections," he said.

ing rising crime in the Central Asian state.

"The problem is clear - illegal proliferation of small arms has a tendency to grow. This becomes a threat to public order and results in the growth of criminal incidents and assassinations," said Col Ravshan Abdurkarimov, deputy chief of staff at the Kyrgyz interior ministry, in the capital, Bishkek.

According to the ministry, the number of murders and attempted murders rose 17 percent in 2005. Kyrgyzstan ranked 13th out of 62 countries surveyed in terms of the numbers of murders per capita, the www.nationmaster.com information website said.

Recent high-profile killings include the murder of three members of the Kyrgyz parliament in 2005 by unknown assailants deemed to be professional killers. In March of this year, police uncovered three large illegal reserves of weapons and ammunition in southern Kyrgyzstan.

"One cache was hidden at the bottom of a canal in the suburbs of the provincial capital [of Osh]," said Zamir Sydykov, a spokesman for the Osh provincial police directorate. "Three factory-made metal boxes with more than 1,300 automatic-weapon cartridges had been preserved in very good condition."

Another illegal arsenal, including a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG), cartridges for Kalashnikov submachine guns and sniper rifles, as well as a hand grenade fuse,



Damage to shops in the village of Iskra after clashes between indigenous Kyrgyz and Dungans. "Under current conditions, illegal proliferation, storage and sales of small arms poses a big threat to the region," Moldaliev of the PRSRC said. Credit: Rustam Mukhamedov/IRIN

Some analysts pointed to a link between growing illicit drug trafficking and the local proliferation of small arms. Osh is a major transit hub for trafficked Afghan heroin via Tajikistan to Russia and western Europe. Afghanistan remains the world's largest supplier of opium.

"Arms trafficking becomes a profitable business among certain circles, along with drug trafficking in Kyrgyzstan. Nowadays, the following combination is common - drugs are exchanged for weapons," said Orozbek Moldaliev, director of the Policy, Religion and Security Research Centre (PRSRC) in Bishkek.

The perception that there are more weapons in circulation means people are choosing to arm themselves in self-defence. Some local NGOs maintained that local businessmen, fearful of their security, had begun acquiring arms.

"There are such people buying guns following cases of looting, violence and illegal property seizure in the capital after the March events of the last year," said Syrymbet Altynov, a businessman-turned-teacher from Bishkek. Following the ouster of former President

Askar Akayev's regime on 24 March 2005, many businesses were looted in the capital after police officers abandoned their duties in fear for their safety.

As for the sources of illegal arms, experts primarily cite arms smuggling and "leakages" of weapons from security bodies. Senior police officers, who wished to remain anonymous, said underground terrorist and radical groups procured most of their weapons abroad, via neighbouring countries.

Many analysts believe, however, that one of the main sources of illegal small arms is theft from military arsenals due to poor supervision and corruption in inventory control. Such cases were common particularly during the first years of independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

"Under current conditions, illegal proliferation, storage and sale of small arms poses a big threat to the region," Moldaliev of the PRSRC said. "Urgent measures should be taken, [but] first of all it is necessary to tighten up control."

NEPAL: Ceasefire offers chance to tackle small arms menace



Maoists claim that they don't get arms supplies from either China or India but they collect arms after raiding and attacking the army barracks and police posts. Anti-gun activists believe that most of the supplies come from India via the open border between Nepal and India where there is no security presence. A huge number of small arms have been reportedly supplied illegally across the border. The small arms have been responsible for most of the killings in the country. Credit: Sagar Shrestha/IRIN

In the remote village of Mahadiyama in Kapilbastu district, 350 km southwest of Nepal's capital Kathmandu, local people still shudder with fear when they recall the murder one year ago of villager Salim

Fakir and his elder brothers Jama and Namdan, who were shot dead in cold blood by Maoist insurgents.

Local witnesses said that the Maoists, who have been waging war against the government for 10 years, had

accused the brothers of joining a local vigilante group which operated against the rebels with help from the security forces.

These vigilante groups began to spring up in the country in 2003, when Kathmandu announced that local villagers could hit back at the rebels by establishing their own militias, known as Village Defence Forces (VDFs).

The controversial move was slammed by rights groups as a move that would plunge the country into full-scale civil war. In Kapilbastu district alone, 200 people have died since late 2003 at the hands of the army, the Maoists and the vigilantes, local rights groups Insec says.

The spread of these groups as part of the armed conflict has seen an explosion in the number of guns circulating in the country as a whole, say peace activists like Bishnu Upreti. "Over 13,000 people have died

during the last decade of conflict and most were killed by army or rebel small arms," he said.

But now in a move that could go some way to halting the proliferation, vigilante groups in Kapilbastu have now started to disband: many are reported to have surrendered their arms to the Maoists. In early May, groups led by notorious vigilante leaders Muna Khan, Murari Kuswaha and Nasir Ali, handed over their arms to local rebel leaders, according to a report by Lumbini Radio, a local FM station in Kapilbastu.

"We are giving up our anti-Maoist campaign as there is now hope for peace due to the ceasefire and talks," said Khan.

Nepalese monarch King Gyanendra gave up direct rule in April and invited the country's seven main political parties to put together an interim government that quickly responded to a rebel ceasefire by declaring one of its own.



Activists said the possession of arms, whether legally by security forces or illegally by Maoists rebels and vigilantes, is growing rapidly and desperately requires government intervention. Credit: Sagar Shrestha/IRIN

But activists warn that this gesture by the vigilantes is not enough, emphasising that the main problem remains the illegal supply of arms across the Nepal-India border. "There is a need to find a way to control the illegal supplies. Unless that happens the proliferation problem will remain intact," said

Upreti.

What's worse is that nobody has any idea of the number of weapons in circulation in Nepal. "There is still no record of the number of small arms used by either the Maoists or the security forces," said Shobha Shrestha from South Asia Small Arms Network (SASANET), a regional group lobbying to reduce weapons proliferation.

Shrestha said her agency would continue to urge Kathmandu to control the illegal importation of arms "so that civilians can live in security". Her organisation is planning to conduct much-needed research into

how small arms are currently spreading in Nepal.

"Once we have an accurate picture, it will then be possible to press the government and the rebels to take measures to control the arms supply," said Shrestha.

At the moment, most weapons come into Nepal from neighbouring India. "The rebels mostly receive their arms through illegal suppliers in India, the smuggling of weapons is very easy: it usually takes place along Nepal's porous 1,700 km border with India," Shrestha added.

According to a local NGO, Friends for Peace, the bulk of small arms smuggled into Nepal come from India's illegal arms bazaar just across the border. Activists maintain the only way to control the supply is through concerted cooperation between India and Nepal.

If the ceasefire evolves into a peace process that can draw the rebels into the mainstream political process, disarming them along with the vigilantes might be possible.

But the rebels have already said they are not yet prepared to put down their guns and are waiting for a comprehensive peace process. "It's too early to talk about disarmament. Our war is not over. This is merely a ceasefire," said rebel leader Akash recently.

Even if the ceasefire does lead to peace, on the wider question of controlling the burgeoning number of small arms in the country, activists say the new government needs to commit to a real reduction.

"This is not just a military issue, but the leading cause of human rights abuse, and weapons proliferation fuels the humanitarian crisis in our country," said peace activist Upreti.

PAKISTAN: Ending illegal gun workshops will curb arms proliferation - activists



Hand-made AK47s for sale at an illegal workshop near the Afghan border.
Credit: Tahira Sarwar/IRIN

Activists have called for alternative jobs for those involved in Pakistan's illegal arms manufacturing industry, located mainly in northwestern parts of the country.

"Tribesmen involved in illegal arms manufacturing already have basic skills, raw materials and their places of work. The government and international agencies can assist them in switching to making other things such as agricultural tools, surgical goods and car parts," Raza Shah Khan, head of the Peshawar-based Sustainable Peace and Development Organisation (SPADO), told IRIN in the provincial capital of Pakistan's North West Frontier Province (NWFP).

Khan noted that illegal arms manufacturers were getting squeezed out of business by the propensity of smuggled weapons available in the region. "This is the time that the government can support them in regularising and diversifying the industry," he added.

Pakistan, according to anti-arms campaigners, has one of the greatest per capita rates of gun ownership in the world. Though there are no official figures, rough estimates put the total number of small arms at large in the country at more than 20 million, with about half of them illegal. NWFP alone is believed to have nearly half a million illegitimate small arms and light weapons.

The severe proliferation of small arms in Pakistan began after the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. In addition to the crossborder flow of weapons, an estimated 30 percent of the weapons funnelled by US and Pakistani intelligence services to the Afghan resistance during the conflict were diverted for other purposes, according to anti-small arms activists.

In Pakistan, the illegal arms market supplies militant sectarian groups, terrorists, drug cartels, criminals and those seeking protection from such groups. In addition, tribal disputes in the frontier provinces of Balochistan, Sindh and Punjab are perpetrated by the abundance of cheaply available firearms.

In the southern port city of Karachi, nearly 18,000 people fell victim to gun violence between 1992 and 1998.

More recently, in March 2006, at least 25 people were killed and 30 hurt in the tribal area of Bara in NWFP

during clashes over preaching rights between supporters of two rival clerics, where the rival factions fought pitched battles with automatic weapons.

Along with extensive smuggling of weapons – mainly from Afghanistan, the small arms menace in Pakistan is also the result of both legal and illegal arms manufacturing units in various parts of NWFP and the neighbouring Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) bordering Afghanistan. While some arms workshops in NWFP are registered with the government, the infamous industry in the FATA, including the main hubs of Darra Adam Khel, Bara and Jamrud, are unregistered.

A 2003 survey by SPADO found there were 1,200 shops selling guns in Darra Adam Khel alone. These were supplied by nearly 1,500 small workshops and more than 50 medium-scale manufacturing units employing over 6,000 gunsmiths.

Small arms have long been a part of traditional Pathan society in NWFP. "Guns have remained an embodiment of physical power in this male-dominated tribal culture and the Darra [Adam Khel] manufacturers basically catered to this market," Khan said.

Gunsmithing was effectively a cottage industry with marginal profits, but was transformed during the Soviet invasion of neighbouring Afghanistan, when demand for weapons from Mujadeen groups soared. The weapons – everything from a pen that doubles as a pistol to a copy of an AK-47, or even an anti-aircraft gun – are made by hand, but carry no serial numbers and are often of poor quality.

Programmes to reduce the number of small arms in Pakistan have had little success, particularly in parts of the country where Islamabad has little authority.



Like many areas of Pakistan, neighbouring Afghanistan also struggles to shed its gun-culture after decades of fighting and the traditional male custom of bearing arms.
Credit: IRIN

But in 2000, state arms manufacturer, Pakistan Ordnance Factories (POF) managed to dent the illegal trade by recruiting some of the skilled artisans from the tribal areas to POF's main manufacturing unit in Wah - a cluster of 14 factories 40 km north of the Pakistani capital, Islamabad.

"So far, we have brought in around 100 skilled artisans to the complex. Their absence from the market and their presence here is certainly making a big difference," POF Chairman Lt Gen Abdul Qayyum was quoted as saying in August 2003.

But analysts say that giving jobs to a few gunmakers will not end small arms proliferation.

"One knows stopping illegal production of arms in Pakistan is not an easy task. It's a question of providing alternative means of income to illegal manufacturers and ending the extensive smuggling [of guns]," said Islamabad-based security and defence analyst, Ayesha Siddiqa Agha.

YEMEN: When cultural norms underpin gun ownership



Yemeni artists urge the government to take measures against the kidnapping of foreigners.
Credit: Mohammed Al-Qadhi/IRIN

"I have cannons, missiles, Kalashnikovs, anti-aircraft guns and hand grenades," said community leader Mohammed Naji, sitting cross-legged in his house in the Yemeni

capital, Sana. "This is a part of our culture, and a tribesman can give up everything except his gun."

Though not everyone in Yemen has an arms cache the size of Naji's, almost every household has at least one gun. Arms possession is particularly common in the north and northwest of the country.

Ethnic vendettas are a common problem in Yemen, resulting in the deaths of more than 2,000 people annually, according to government figures. In one example, revenge killings between the Hajerah and Annis tribes in Ibb and Thamar provinces, south of Sana, claimed the lives of more than 30 people and wounded 100 more in early July 2005. That particular vendetta, centred on a land dispute, has flared up intermittently for the last five years.

The crime rate in Yemen is soaring, with shootings almost daily to resolve disputes – or even just when tempers rise. The Ministry of the Interior reported that 34,655 crimes were committed in 2005, and government studies have blamed this high crime rate on the proliferation of firearms in the country.

The problem also has a regional dimension, with a 2003 United Nations report naming Yemen as the main conduit of weapons to the conflict-plagued Horn of Africa and parts of East Africa.

Following the recent wave of kidnappings of foreign tourists in December 2005 and January this year, there has been growing pressure on the government to tackle the problem of arms proliferation. Even before the kidnappings, protestors took to the streets of Sana

in September 2005 to demand a parliamentary debate on a draft law to control the ownership and use of firearms. Led by the mayor of Sana, Ahmed al-Kuhlani, protestors marched from al-Tahrir Square to the parliament, where they delivered a letter demanding immediate action to stop the proliferation of weapons in Yemen's cities. However, the parliamentary debate did not result in any legislation.

The availability of arms

There are no exact figures for the number of firearms in circulation in Yemen, but unofficial estimates suggest that there are almost 17 million weapons circulating in the country, which according to the latest census in March 2005 has a population of 19.7 million.

Whatever the absolute numbers, firearms are widely available and sold throughout Yemen. The most important markets are Suq al-Talh in Sana province, 242 km north of the capital, and Suq Juhainah, 40 km outside the city. There are three other regional markets located in Al-Jowf, Al-Baydah and Abyan. There are also an estimated 300 small gun shops in the country, with an average inventory of 100 weapons each. Some influential ethnic leaders in Yemen are also involved in the weapons trade.

In theory, arms traders need a licence from the interior ministry and have to give the government a list of buyers and their purchases. "The reality is different," al-Asbahi said. "These provisions of the law are not enacted at all. The traders claim they just buy and sell what is available in the market, but the new stockpiles of firearms show they are coming from outside the country."

The social significance of arms

For Yemenis, guns are not merely instruments of hunting, defence and attack, but symbols of status, power, manhood, responsibility, wealth – and celebration. Firing guns in the air is a traditional means of celebrating important social occasions, including weddings. On any given Friday, hundreds of men gather at Wadi Dhahr, a deep rocky canyon outside Sana, to celebrate the marriages of men in their community. Holding guns above their heads, they display them with pride,

firing rounds in the air.

"Just as some people wear ties, some Yemenis will carry guns. It is a part of one's dress," said Ali Hussein, who had come to celebrate with fellow community members. The men around him brandished an assortment of AK-47 assault rifles, hunting rifles and pistols.

Ethnic customs, or qabalyi, also emphasise defence of the community, defence of land, water wells, women and honour. As these usually involve forms of violence, or at least the threat of violence, most entail the possession of weapons. International campaigners against small arms emphasise the importance of addressing customs and practices that promote firearm ownership when tackling the proliferation of small arms.

Reasons for the profusion of arms

There are several reasons for the widespread availability of firearms in Yemen throughout the last two centuries – and the enormous increase in recent years.

Colonial forces, such as the Ottomans and British in the nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, brought a large volume of weapons to Yemen. This pattern was exacerbated when the former Soviet Union became a strong force in southern Yemen following the British withdrawal in 1967.

The division of Yemen in the 1960s produced two warring states, the Yemen Arab Republic in the north and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in the south. The two sides fought a number of border conflicts – each requiring new arms supplies – in the 1970s and 1980s. When the north finally conquered the south in 1994, under President Ali Abdullah Saleh, most of the southern stockpiles of Soviet small arms disappeared into the countryside. They are believed to have fallen into the hands of the ethnic groups living in the region.

Another factor that has helped promote the culture of firearms in Yemen, according to local observers, is the phenomenon of heavily armed escorts that accompany social dignitaries, from government officials to community leaders. Some 75,000 men work as armed escorts, including 1,500 who work for members of parliament alone, according to media reports. Current legislation in Yemen exempts the president, his deputies, current and past ministers, members of parliament, officials appointed by decree, police and military officers, judges, prosecutors and diplomats working in the country from needing a licence to carry a firearm.

Efforts to control firearms

Yemen's current gun-control legislation dates back to 1992, but the law does not designate the necessary authority to control arms proliferation, according to the interior ministry.

In 1999, rising crime and violence involving firearms led the cabinet to draft a new bill to regulate the possession of weapons. The draft law stipulated that Yemenis living in urban areas obtain a licence for each weapon they possess. It also gave the interior ministry more power to control arms, since it reduced the number of people entitled to licences. However, that draft has languished in parliament for the past seven years, due in no small part to the opposition of parliamentary speaker Sheikh Abdullah al-Ahmer, head of the powerful Hashid community and of the Islamist party Islah. According to media reports, he believes that the law is the beginning of a process to disarm the country's ethnic communities. Other community figures share his concerns and have joined him in opposing gun control.

In March 2005, however, the General People's Congress (GPC) parliamentary bloc of President Saleh, under popular pressure on the issue, threw its weight behind the draft law and voted to begin parliamentary debate the following September. Although the group stressed the urgency of discussing and endorsing the draft bill, the debate yielded nothing concrete.

At present, there is no law banning the trade of firearms, and this has also raised concern. "We believe that the question of trade in firearms is very dangerous and that the importing of weapons should be limited to the government only," said Sultan al-Barakani, head of the GPC bloc of members of parliament. "It is interesting that the government has taken a decision banning the trade of explosives, but it should also control the trade of firearms."

The regional factor

The government of Yemen's new interest in arms control stems from its campaign against terrorism. Officials said that terrorist elements have flourished in the larger context of ethnic feuds and plentiful weapons. In an effort to remove heavy weapons belonging to ethnic communities from circulation, the government started a buy-back programme with the support of the United States. The effort has floundered, however, as a result of inadequate funding. "Yemen spent 8 billion riyals [\$43.7 million] to purchase weapons from the tribesmen," said foreign minister Abu Bakr al-Qirbi. "We need to control the situation."

The problem of arms possession in Yemen extends beyond its borders. There are serious concerns about weapons smuggled out of the country and used to fuel violent conflicts in the Horn of Africa, and notably in Somalia. A report submitted to the United Nations Security Council in November 2003 named Yemen as the chief source of weapons to a number of East African and Horn of Africa countries, including Kenya and Ethiopia. The report said it was relatively easy to obtain surface-to-air missiles in Yemen and export them to Somalia, noting that the missiles used in the failed attack on an Israeli airplane leaving the coastal Kenyan city of Mombasa in November 2002 were brought through Somalia from Yemen.

Following reports that some of the guns used in the al-Qaeda attacks against the US consulate in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in January 2005 belonged to the Yemeni army - which its government denied - Yemen announced on 27 October 2005 that it had taken some measures to prohibit weapons traders from purchasing weapons for the Yemeni military. This came after pressure by the US and Saudi Arabia, which accused Yemen of not controlling its borders and doing enough to prevent the smuggling of weapons into Saudi territories. The decision was welcomed by the US and considered a good step towards controlling arms trafficking in Yemen.

Al-Qirbi agreed that weapons smuggling is a very serious problem and said that Yemen was doing all it could to put a stop to it. He cited a coast guard project, which was started some years ago with the help of donors, including the US, and is expected to cost US \$60 million and require around 150 boats and aims to patrol and monitor the coastal waters. "We

have a long coastline of 2,500 km that needs a lot of logistical support for the coast guards," Al-Qirbi said. "We hope donors will help us control the smuggling of weapons."

Even if the coast guard does successfully combat arms smuggling and the government does tighten up gun control within Yemen, a critical challenge that still must be faced is how to address the cultural factors that fuel the proliferation of small arms.

3. Interviews - Interview with Barbara Frey, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the prevention of human rights violations committed with small arms and light weapons



Barbara Frey, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the prevention of human rights violations committed with small arms and light weapons.

Barbara Frey is United Nations Special Rapporteur on the prevention of human rights violations committed with small arms and light weapons and director of the Human Rights Program at the University of Minnesota. She was appointed Special Rapporteur by the UN Sub-Commission on Human Rights in 2002 and given the task of preparing a comprehensive study on the issue of preventing human-rights violations committed with small arms and light weapons. Elements of the study have included the examination of the interaction between existing international humanitarian law and human rights law, and state actions with respect to arms transfers, and of the policies and practices of 35 states. Frey's final report will be submitted to the sub-commission at its August 2006 session.

QUESTION: How are human rights affected by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons?

ANSWER: It is fairly obvious that small arms used both by state agents and in the hands of nonstate actors have tremendous effects on the human rights of individuals around the world.

Around 200,000 to 270,000 people are killed in nonconflict settings on an annual basis, and a similar number are killed during armed conflict, meaning that people in enormous numbers have the most fundamental right – that is, the right to life – taken away from them. In addition, other violations of bodily integrity, such as torture and rape, may involve small arms or be committed at gunpoint.

An entire spectrum of economic and social rights is also affected. For example, huge population displacement is caused by the threat of small arms. Even development itself has been affected. Just look at Medellín in Colombia, where children are unable to go to school and people cannot walk safely down the streets.

Small arms have a pervasive impact on human rights, and it is thus of vital importance to highlight this impact and to outline what legal obligations states may have to take against such abuses.

Has the increasing focus on the relationship between small-arms abuses and human-rights violations helped to promote a greater acceptance of the need to address small-arms misuse?

It has helped in a small way. The concept has certainly taken root in discussion – the relationship between the violation of human rights and small-arms abuse has been a key focus of the United Nations conference process, and the UN Programme of Action.

The human-rights community is, on one hand, keen to see what concrete steps can be taken to prevent small-arms abuse and to understand better its role in clarifying international norms so that states will know what is required of them. But the majority of human-rights lawyers who examine classic human-rights abuses are generally not arms experts and are often reluctant to get involved in the development of norms and regulations to control arms. Even experts such as the UN special rapporteur on summary and arbitrary execution may not note the role of weapons with any special interest.

Those people documenting human-rights violations must acknowledge the significance of weapons and identify the role and type of weapons that are used in committing such violations. Highlighting this technical link between weapons and the abuse of human rights is critical. A conceptual link such as this will help to elucidate the responsibilities of states to prevent human rights abuses committed with small arms.

Community-policing efforts are an excellent example of how states can be proactive. Not only do such programmes work at a community level, with the aim of promoting disarmament and addressing the demand for firearms, but they also train police in their human-rights obligations.

Q: Are the existing international legal standards sufficient to oblige states to address small-arms abuse?

A: Existing human-rights standards are not enough. There needs to be further articulation of guidelines and principles that connect a state's obligation to protect the right to life and the obligation to control the transfer and misuse of small arms and light weapons.

In the area of international humanitarian law, principles that can be applied to small arms misuse are much

clearer, as the drafters of these laws are often fully engaged with issues specifically generated by armed conflict.

The will to act is ever increasing, as states recognise the vast collective costs of small-arms misuse – from terrorism to criminal and gang-related violence. However, states are unwilling to disarm themselves if they perceive their own national security to be threatened. It is imperative that practical solutions work to lower these concerns.

While there is no international legal requirement for states to disarm, there are great incentives to do so. Some states have begun to think in terms of the benefits of limiting small-arms transfers, and I hope that various protocols for the prevention, control and reduction of small arms that have been implemented in some national and regional contexts bear fruit and serve to get other states involved.

Q: Wouldn't governments be more reluctant to curb small-arms transfers, given the economic interests of those benefiting from this trade?

A: My feeling is that the economic costs of the small-arms trade far outweigh the economic benefits, particularly in the illicit sphere. The people who are benefiting from illegal transfers are not significant national companies employing thousands, but rather are criminals and unregulated brokers who make small profits at any human cost.

Incentives must provoke the realisation among states that they need to crack down on the worst criminal violators – those, for example, who manage to transfer weapons into Darfur at significant human cost. Only if small-arms manufacture and transfer are regulated and if the international outlaws facilitating this illegal activity are tracked down will governments begin to understand the benefits that will accrue in terms of the international economy and development.

Indeed, it is the richer nations who have the most to gain from a reduction in armed violence, and it is they who must provide incentives for more marginalised countries. Just as there are numerous incentives for countries not to produce nuclear weapons, a similar approach must be developed to deal with small arms.

There is no panacea – the small-arms trade presents multifaceted problems and demands multifaceted solutions. As the nascent international justice system develops, we should perhaps consider prosecuting the worst arms brokers, some of whom are effectively complicit in genocide. Even if such prosecutions do not stem the flow of weapons, they will send a strong message. The fact that brokers as notorious as Victor Bout [an international arms dealer whose fields of operation have included Sierra Leone, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola] are allowed to walk about as free men should be an embarrassment to the international community.

Q: Have efforts to draw attention to the connection between small-arms abuse and human-rights violations been successful?

A: At least we have started talking. A number of states are beginning to realise that the problem of small arms goes beyond illicit transfers – incentives must be provided to curb transfers of small arms more generally and norms must be developed that deal with violations of human rights and international humanitarian law that result from any form of small-arms abuse, including with arms that may have been obtained through legal transfers. A good starting point is reframing existing standards regarding use of force and firearms in light of human-rights obligations, an effort currently taking place in the sub-commission. We must encourage states to implement law enforcement standards into their domestic law and to train their law enforcement personnel to follow those standards.

We must also encourage a shift in focus to the illicit transfer of small arms and examine other forms of manufacture, transfer and use – all of which damage the wellbeing of states and, fundamentally, continue to harm humans across the globe.

Interview with Rebecca Peters, Director of IANSA



Rebecca Peters, Director of IANSA.
Credit: IRIN

Rebecca Peters, Director of IANSA, the International Action Network on Small Arms.

IANSA is one of the three partners of the Control Arms Campaign, and is a global network of 700 civil society organisations. She played a critical role in the fight to ban civilian gun ownership in Australia in the 1990s and now is a high-profile commentator on issues relating to small arms, recently addressing the United Nations Security Council.

QUESTION: How did the Control Arms Campaign emerge, and who are the major participants?

ANSWER: The campaign emerged from existing efforts to establish an arms trade treaty that would require states not to transfer arms to countries known for human-rights abuses, or to countries in conflict or where sustainable development is likely to be undermined.

The idea originated with Óscar Arias Sánchez, former President of Costa Rica and Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1987. He came up with the idea of a code of conduct on weapons transfers and drafted in some other Peace Prize winners to promote the code. After this group of very eminent peace activists had promoted the Nobel Laureates' International Code of Conduct on Arms Transfers for some time, the idea was taken up by non-governmental organisations around the world and became an international campaign. The campaign also attracted the attention of human-rights and development organisations, which is why Amnesty International and Oxfam got involved.

Between the many branches and affiliates of the three major partners, the campaign brought together a very large collection of groups. Both Amnesty and Oxfam have offices in many different countries, while IANSA brought in 700 NGOs, based in approximately 100 countries.

The campaign also recognises that if you want to bring both the arms trade and armed violence under control, it is not enough to focus on international arms transfers. Of equal importance is national and regional work to reduce armed violence – from national legislation and regional agreements to local programmes to reduce proliferation and misuse of guns.

The campaign was launched in October 2003, which is the time of year that the United Nations General Assembly First Committee on Disarmament and Security meets for its four- to five-week session. We hope that this year, to coincide with the third anniversary of the campaign, there will be a resolution put forward to begin negotiations for an arms trade treaty. Around 50 governments are for the idea, and we believe that some will be moving the necessary resolution.

Q: What do you feel have been the key achievements of the Control Arms Campaign?

A: Certainly getting this many countries to express support for an international treaty in just three years has been an important achievement. Our work with national and regional bodies has also influenced some regional agreements introduced in recent years, such as the Nairobi Protocol, signed by states in Central and East Africa in 2004.

We have also been able to mobilise other global networks on the issue. The World Council of Churches, for example, has issued a statement of support, while the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is now linking small-arms misuse with human-rights violations, which it had never done in the past.

The campaign has certainly helped to infect humanitarian organisations with the notion that if you are serious about human rights, you need to do something about small arms. The link between the proliferation of small arms and damage to human rights is a very new, but increasingly important, concept.

Equally, the campaign has successfully linked small arms with development issues, whereas previously they were only considered to be of concern in a military or security context. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), for example, has recently recognised programmes designed to combat the proliferation and misuse of small arms as development work.

The campaign has certainly worked to get small arms on the agenda. The UN World Summit in 2005 only dealt with two issues relating to security: landmines and small arms. And the report of the Secretary-General's high-level panel, "A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility", also mentioned small arms specifically.

Q: Why are small arms such a major focus of the Control Arms Campaign?

A: Critically, guns are the weapons that kill the most people. In addition – and this is especially shocking considering the devastation they cause – small arms are the only category of weapons that are not governed by an international agreement. Indeed, the only thing regulating the trade in guns is demand.

Small arms are disproportionately harmful. Vast numbers of people are killed by guns – between 300,000 and 500,000 every year. While some countries argue that the arms trade is too important economically to be highly regulated, this argument does not necessarily hold. The trade in small arms, at around US \$4 billion per annum, is actually worth very little compared to the value of the global trade in coffee, which is worth approximately \$50 billion. Small arms do not have a high value in international trade, especially given the amount of devastation they cause. The World Bank has calculated that in Latin America, for example, armed violence removes 12 percent from the continent's total gross domestic product.

Increasingly, the economic and public-health costs of firearms injuries are being calculated, and it is clear that the gun business is simply not worth enough money to make tolerating gun violence worthwhile. The impact of these costs is particularly significant in a developing country. A member of IANSA in El Salvador has calculated that the extra annual costs associated with dealing with gunshot injuries would equal the cost of a brand new hospital. Bullet wounds demand far more resources and attention than many other injuries, and victims are more likely to take longer to recover or to be permanently disabled. The sums just do not add up.

Q: If the costs of armed violence are so disproportionate, and the value of the trade – particularly in small arms – is not so great, then why is there resistance to the introduction of controls?

A: One of the major problems is that the people involved in these negotiations generally come from the military sector or defence departments. They have often spent their lives surrounded by weapons and do not, for example, feel the impact of armed violence on the health budget of a country. While they do of course care, progress will be much more substantial when we are able to convince officials from other departments, such as health and justice, to participate in discussions about arms controls. Only if a wider variety of government representatives are involved in discussion, will the true impact of small arms be realised.

In addition, although the global value of the gun industry is small, it is seen as large in specific countries. In Eastern Europe, for example, small-arms production plays an important economic role. As the guns are exported, the impact is not felt in the country of origin, but rather in countries in Africa, for example. It is not surprising that officials who are negotiating on behalf of gun-producing countries are not concerned with the human impact of small arms – they might be if people were dying in tens of thousands in their own countries.

There is also an old idea, dating from the Cold War period, which equates a large number of weapons with national security, which is why countries invest in huge armies and arsenals. However, the paradigm has shifted, and the emphasis now must be on human security. The people who are in charge are still sticking to this Cold War assumption about national security, and unless officialdom is diversified and new concepts of human security embraced, thousands of people will continue to lose their lives for the sake of conventional practice.

Finally, the majority of small arms are in the hands of civilians, making it much more difficult for governments to deliver on their commitments. While larger weapons are generally government-owned, millions of individuals must be considered when drafting small-arms controls.

Q: How could arms embargoes be made more effective? How can arms transfers be better regulated to ensure that guns do not end up on the black market or in the illegal sphere?

A: Currently, arms embargoes rely on the goodwill of governments, as the UN does not have the power or the resources to enforce embargoes. One of the easiest changes a government could make is to alter their national law so that the violation of a UN arms embargo is a criminal offence. However, the old notion of a crime being committed by one person, in one location, has to be rethought, as often embargo busters may not physically be in the country through which the weapons pass.

Criminal law must keep up with all the twists and turns that gunrunners go through to avoid being caught. Governments have managed to put in place regulations governing the incredibly complicated pathways of international financial transactions – they must now do the same for weapon transfers.

Transfers of weapons can start off as legal – that is, when they are licensed by both the government of the exporting country and the government of the importing country – but can easily move into the illegal sector. For example, a government may refuse to allow the export of guns to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

but permit transfers to Uganda, even if it believes that the same guns will quickly be moved over the border to DRC. Governments should have an obligation to ensure that the latter does not happen. They should demand evidence that the guns stay in the country to which they were transferred.

Q: How can the enforcement of gun-control laws be ensured?

A: The problem of guns does not stand alone – often issues of governance and questions of corruption are closely related. Police in many countries where armed violence is a problem often do not make the effort to enforce gun-control laws or are involved in the illegal gun trade themselves. Police are also known to misuse their weapons, or to abuse their own positions of power. All these contribute to a desire among citizens be armed – their own government is failing to protect them or, indeed, actively attacks them.

In addition, there must be policies in place that are designed in such a way that they can be successfully implemented. For example, a gun law should ensure that all weapons are registered, just like cars. Many laws demand that the gun is registered only after it is bought, thereby effectively making registration optional. In some countries, the seller must register the transaction upon purchase of the gun, and the buyer cannot take possession of the gun until the registration process is complete.

Sometimes laws are designed in such a way that they undermine their own effectiveness – the point in a transaction at which a gun is registered may seem to be very minor, but in fact makes all the difference. IANSA helps to develop principles for effective laws on civilian gun possession, to ensure that laws have the greatest chance of being enforced. In addition, effective enforcement will depend on improving police integrity and record-keeping capacity.

Q: If a global arms trade treaty was successfully introduced, how should the guns that are already in circulation be dealt with?

A: One good thing to come out of the UN process on small arms is the acceptance of the need to manage the existing weapons stockpile. While it seems obvious, the notion of destroying guns once a state is finished with them is a revolutionary concept for governments. In the past, when a country was upgrading its arsenal, or confiscating weapons from criminals, the guns would be sold, without any thought for how they might be used in the future. When the huge armies in the Soviet Union demobilised, millions of guns were sold.

New guns are being produced at a rate of eight million per annum, but being destroyed at a rate of one million per year. We are falling further and further behind. We must reduce production of small arms and increase their destruction.

Interview with Cate Buchanan, Manager of the Human Security and Small Arms Programme at the Geneva-based Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue



Cate Buchanan, Manager of the Human Security and Small Arms Programme at the Geneva-based Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.
Credit: IRIN

Cate Buchanan

Manager of the Human Security and Small Arms Programme at the Geneva-based Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. The Programme, created in 2001, contains a portfolio of projects that have sought to examine and prioritise greater understanding of the human cost of weapons availability and misuse. Such projects range from a multi-year, multi-country study of the perceptions of humanitarian workers of gun violence; a quarterly Bulletin which examines a variety of thematic and regional concerns; an accessible policy and advocacy guide to the small arms issue designed for the humanitarian community to engage with the small arms issue; a project examining the inclusion (and otherwise) of disarmament and weapons control in peace agreements and peace processes; and finally, a policy 'road map' for the UN process on small arms control, a publication which is widely regarded as a clear and compelling framework for a human security approach to the small arms crisis. Publications related to these projects are all available in various languages at www.hdcentre.org

QUESTION: In 1997, a Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms decided to define "small arms" as those weapons designed for personal use and "light weapons" as those designed for use by several persons serving as a crew. Are these definitions useful?

ANSWER: This was a negotiated definition – and therefore a political one. From a policy-making perspective it has its advantages and drawbacks. Among its advantages are that it groups together weapons that are easily portable and highly lethal, and whose manufacture, trade and use are not currently subject to a legally binding international agreement.

Further, the definition usefully does not separate weapons designed for military use from commercial weapons – reflecting the reality that both types are available to a wide range of users, uniformed and civilian, legal and illegal. They are grouped together because ultimately they share more similarities than differences.

On the other hand, the definition does not include things like craft-made weapons – those produced by hand, which is common in many places.

The question of ammunition and explosives is also a growing concern. In the context of the international efforts to control small arms, ammunition was originally included in the scope of the United Nations Programme of Action on small arms, but recent debates and events appear to have rolled back this understanding.

Q: Can small arms be used "legitimately"?

A: Whereas what is "legal" depends on applicable local, national and international laws governing small arms, what is "legitimate" is more difficult to determine, requiring in addition respect for principles of necessity, proportionality and accountability.

The problem is that you can never guarantee the legitimate use of small arms. As long as small arms are widely available and cheap, they will be misused in ill-disciplined hands.

Q: Which groups in particular are likely to misuse small arms?

A: Small-arms misuse occurs wherever guns are – and they are everywhere, so the range of misuses and situations is wide. Gun violence occurs between individual civilians as well as collectives, such as insurgents and rebel factions, and by state agents such as the police or military.

The Small Arms Survey, an independent research project based in Geneva, has found that there are more gun homicides committed by civilians (around 200,000 every year) than direct deaths in armed conflict (around 100,000 per year). Even in situations of armed conflict, a recent study on relief and development worker victimisation conducted by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and the Small Arms Survey has demonstrated that it is civilians armed with guns, rather than organised armed groups, who pose the greatest consistent threat.

Civilian misuse is widespread and an area which deserves far greater attention. It is particularly significant when you consider that 60 percent of the world's estimated 640 million guns are in the hands of civilians – in varying states of legality.

Q: What demands motivate the acquisition and misuse of small arms?

A: The key factors influencing gun acquisition – so-called “demand” factors – have been categorised in four groups: personal security; socioeconomic stability; individual status, identity and belonging; and political identity and group status. All four factors motivate the acquisition and use – or misuse – of weapons.

Demand factors in general are underreported, with news reports often not looking beyond the violence itself, and policy makers concentrating much more on restricting the supply of weapons. Also poorly understood are the factors that counterbalance the urge to use guns to resolve conflict or promote power in some form. Equally important questions to be asking include, what factors lead people in the same community not to possess a gun? And can this teach us something about possible interventions to reduce gun violence?

Q: Which groups are most vulnerable to small-arms abuse and why?

A: Young men are overwhelmingly the dominant users and abusers of guns, as well as the primary victims of armed violence: Over 90 percent of gun-related homicides occur among men, as do 88 percent of gun-related suicides. Poor and disenfranchised men are particularly at risk. This point is so obvious that it does not yet get the attention it deserves – but this is changing.

This is not to minimise the impact of small arms on women and girls, who are routinely killed, abused or coerced at the point of a gun – predominantly guns wielded by men. Indeed, the impact of small-arms violence cannot be calculated by measuring the death toll alone: Injuries, intimidation, coercion or a simple restriction of movements are other serious consequences of gun violence and misuse.

The reasons for the vulnerability of these groups in particular is a very complex and important question, but the fact that men are the majority of users and victims of small arms violence points to a relationship between masculinity and weapons use and misuse. Research shows that male gun violence is deeply entwined with issues of male entitlement to power and insecurity, as well as class and race issues.

Q: In what ways are children particularly affected by armed violence?

A: Across Africa and Asia, children are coerced or recruited into fighting forces, private security and other jobs, which require them to carry arms and to fight. At least 10 countries continue to use child soldiers in armed conflicts. Many “recruiters” are themselves armed, and this means that the gun in the hands of the recruiter is a key determinant in children ending up as soldiers.

In the eyes of armed groups, the use of children has clear advantages. They can be easily controlled and forced to do dangerous jobs; they fill out the ranks when adult males are unavailable or cannot be coerced; and so on. From the child’s point of view, those who are not recruited against their will may see few other options. Their families may not be functional, and they may find a sense of belonging in a group they do not find elsewhere, as well as a livelihood.

In developed countries where guns are prevalent among civilians, children often access them and use them to commit suicide or to intentionally or accidentally kill others. Illicit drug gangs in the Americas are also staffed by armed young people – principally young men – who act as couriers and soldiers.

Q: What role do guns play in the perpetration of violence against women? Would improved gun control laws help reduce incidents of sexual violence?

A: Certainly, guns are used to facilitate sexual violence against women and girls both in wartime and peacetime. This is common in times of war, when social controls break down even further. But unfortunately, even the peacetime social norms of many societies include and even condone violence against women.

Guns exert a powerful coercive effect. Thus, if guns are instrumental in the commission of sexual violence against women, it makes perfect sense to address the availability of guns as a way of reducing rape. It may actually be “easier” to first focus on the gun, because the attitudes that underpin rape and other forms of sexual violence in a given society can take a very long time to alter. The control of guns can often provide a useful entry point for wide discussions about violence prevention.

Addressing the availability of guns means establishing licensing and record-keeping systems to keep track of who owns what guns, so that each gun is uniquely identified with its owner, who is legally responsible and accountable for it. In Canada, police are authorised to confiscate guns from the homes of domestic abusers when called to the scene. Although there is no correlation between these laws and a reduction in rape in Canada, over the past 15 years femicides committed with guns have plummeted 75 percent, compared to a

drop of 25 percent for femicides not committed with guns.

Q: How has the nature of human-rights violations been altered by the use of guns?

A: Human-rights abuses of course take place without guns, and they would still occur if small arms did not exist. The question is whether they would be as prevalent and lethal. The answer is no. It is hard to imagine a small group of people terrorising and forcibly evicting entire communities without weapons such as the AK-47. It is often noted that although the majority of killings in the Rwanda genocide were committed with blades, guns were needed to round up the victims and keep them surrounded before killing them. That is the dynamic that guns bring to human-rights abuses.

If an unarmed soldier beats a civilian while an armed soldier looks on, clearly the gun is involved in the violence on some level. Removing the gun from the equation makes flight possible, and thus reduces the chance of violent injury or death.

Q: What are the indirect consequences of armed violence, and how significant are they?

A: The indirect impacts of armed violence include a range of consequences that, while difficult to quantify, are wide-ranging. For example, when large numbers of people are forced to flee from their homes at gunpoint, many of those people will suffer nonviolent deaths and malnutrition, disease and starvation. In some sense, those deaths are attributable to the guns, since without the guns the displacement would not have occurred in the first place. The same occurs with sexual violence against women and girls. Other secondary impacts include reducing or eliminating development gains. Widespread armed violence contributes to economic collapse, damaged or destroyed urban infrastructure, and the withdrawal of private investment.

The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and the Small Arms Survey have also documented how small arms in the hands of both civilians and armed groups leads to another secondary impact: a reduction in humanitarian assistance. Routine armed threats to aid workers reduce access to beneficiaries of aid assistance and development programming, and lead to interruptions or closures of operations. As these services are often the primary sources of assistance to populations in dire need, the impacts of a few armed attacks can be catastrophic for thousands.

Interview with a former LRA soldier, Moses Rubangangweyo



Former LRA soldier, Moses Rubangangweyo, abducted as a child.
Credit: IRIN

Moses Rubangangweyo was abducted by the Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) at the age of 15 and served as a soldier in its ranks for nine years. Formed in 1987, the LRA is a rebel paramilitary group that operates mainly in northern Uganda. It has been engaged in armed rebellion against the government for nearly 20 years. The LRA has been accused of widespread human-rights violations, including the mass abduction of civilians and the use of child soldiers.

QUESTION: How did you become a member of the LRA?

ANSWER: I was abducted in 1996 from my boarding school in Gulu when I was 15 years old. On 22 August 1996, at around midnight, 29 LRA soldiers, each with a gun, surrounded our school. They attacked us, tied our hands together, and we were forced to move off into the night. They took us to join the force of a commander some distance away, who has since died.

After two days on the move, they gathered us together, picked two people at random – one of whom was my brother – and killed them in front of us to make sure we were too afraid to escape. Then we were beaten – each person was given 50 strokes. This was to mark us as LRA soldiers. We were not used to that kind of beating and torture, and so suffered from a lot of pain.

We continued to move for months. On 9 October, the same commander who abducted us abducted some other people. We were all trained together and told that if we escaped, we would be killed, and that if someone else escaped, we would all be beaten. In December 1996, we were shipped to Sudan, where our intensive training took place and where we were equipped with AK-47s. All the abductees were very well armed – we each had our own gun.

Q: Did having a gun change your experience?

A: If you have a gun, you are respected. A gun means that you have been trained and are now a soldier. For the first six months in the LRA, you are doubted. You are just a recruit and are not taken seriously. They beat you and do not give you enough food. They make you carry heavy loads, and if you complain, they will beat you to death with a gun. When you have your own weapon, you have a greater sense of identity - you are much more free. Almost nobody will monitor you, nor think that you will escape.

Q: What sort of weapons does the LRA have, and how do they operate?

A: The LRA has underground stores - the Sudanese government supplied the weapons and the LRA then buried them. They have pistols, AK-47s, RPGs [rocket-propelled grenades] B10 recoilless rifles, SPG9 Kopye guns, mortars, 12.7 anti-aircraft guns and GPMGs [general purpose machine guns]. The LRA are more heavily armed than the government, and their weapons are much more sophisticated. The Sudanese also gave the LRA four tanks with trained drivers.

In addition, the LRA uses telephones, walkie-talkies and satellite phones, and they depend on the local community to gather information. The local people would tell us: "They [the UPDF, Uganda People's Defence Force, the official armed forces of Uganda] have a mortar and 200 soldiers."

Q: How do abductions take place, and whom does the LRA target?

A: Five soldiers alone can abduct 100 people. They can overrun a village. Just four soldiers can carry out a successful ambush. The LRA likes to abduct nine- to 15-year-olds because it is easy to turn the mind of a young person. "We will overthrow Museveni, and you will be a minister," they told us. "We are not abducting you, we are saving you from Museveni."

Kony [Joseph Kony, the leader of the LRA, who claims to be a mystic and a prophet] has a spirit that everyone fears: It follows you wherever you go. If you do something wrong, it will see and will kill your parents.

Children between the ages of seven and nine are the best fighters, so they will not be tortured. In fact, if a child between seven and nine years old died under my charge, I would have to explain why. But if they are older, they could be tortured or left to starve, and I wouldn't be questioned about the death.

The girls who are abducted are the 11- and 12-year-olds. When they reach 16, they are given to men, but some will have previously been sex slaves.

Q: How are children born in captivity treated?

A: If you are born in captivity, you are part of a new generation. They will not torture you, but will teach you: "This is an RPG; this is an AK-47." Such children are not just trained in one arm, but can set landmines and shoot RPGs and mortars. Even a child who is one metre tall can fire an RPG.

Seven- to nine-year-old children are the best fighters, as if they are told to kill someone, they will do it. They have no values. They do not think - they just do it. They are brave, brutal and active in the field. A child soldier cannot question. However, if they do, they will be punished. A recruit was given a gun while an officer bathed, and when he had soap in his eyes, the child escaped with the gun. He was quickly caught, and beaten 600 times and told to recover the gun. When he ran away again, they went after his relatives.

Q: How did the LRA obtain supplies when you were with them? And what effects did these tactics have on the local population?

A: When we were in Sudan, there was a period during which we had no food. We had to fight for food, and when there were no internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, we had to rely on looting. The Sudanese government did not give us enough food. At least 1,000 LRA soldiers died in Sudan due to malaria, malnutrition and a lack of medicine. If they had not been taken to fight in the bush, they would not have died in this way.

Many women and children were killed in the conflict. A [helicopter] gunship will shoot any women and children, because they do not know how to dodge the fire – they walk in a line, and it is very easy to target them. Women were also raped at gunpoint. If a man with a gun tells a woman, "I want to have sex with you," what will she do? Where will she go? She has to comply.

No one knows how many people have died – the UPDF and UNICEF [UN Children's Fund] don't know. They just guess. The LRA does not bury people, especially those killed in battle. Rather they leave the body under a tree and cover it with leaves. So the LRA also does not know how many have died, as there are no graves to count.

Interview with Jackson Acama, former volunteer soldier in the LRA



Jackson Acama, former volunteer soldier in the LRA.
Credit: IRIN

Jackson Acama joined the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) at the age of 24 and served as a soldier for 17 years. Formed in 1987, the LRA is a Ugandan rebel paramilitary group that has been engaged in an armed rebellion against the Ugandan government for nearly 20 years. It has been accused of widespread human-rights violations, mainly in the north of the country, including the abduction of children, who have been forced to serve as soldiers, porters or sex slaves. The conflict has caused some 1.6 million people to flee their villages to live in camps for the displaced.

QUESTION: How did you become a member of the LRA?

ANSWER: I joined the LRA voluntarily, in 1987, and was in the rebel ranks for 17 years. I was formerly with the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF), but after the conflict [resulting from President Yoweri Museveni's coup in 1986] people divided and some joined the LRA.

Most people were abducted in 1987 – that was a year of mass abductions. People were very scared at that time. Rebel operations paralysed the north completely. If you escaped abduction, your home was destroyed. There was no schooling – in fact, almost all of the schools in the area were closed from 1987 to 1990.

Q: What supplies, including arms, were provided, and how did you obtain the supplies you needed?

A: In the beginning, we were not provided with arms. From when I joined the insurgents in 1987 until 1994, which is when the Sudanese government began to provide arms, we had no weapons. After 1994, we used AK-47s, and the officers used pistols. SPG9 Kopye guns were also provided, but certainly most weapons currently used are AK-47s. Initially, guns were solely used for fighting and not for food raids.

However, when the Sudanese government was put under pressure by the international community in 1999 to stop supplying the LRA, we felt that we should instead rely on the community for food. The LRA did plant sorghum, but when there was no food, operations teams used the power of the gun to raid villages.

During the Iron Fist operation in 2002 [when the UPDF was allowed to cross into southern Sudan to root out the LRA from its bases there] the LRA was entirely dependent on food raids. They would pick family members to go on the raids, and if one person from a family was sent for food, they were expected to bring back enough food for the entire family, as well as a bundle of food to be distributed to the sick or disabled.

Ammunition was also provided by the Sudanese government, up until 2002. There is ammunition hidden underground in very many places in northern Ugandan and southern Sudan. In addition, they supplied medication. There were people in the LRA trained to use western methods of treatment, but we also used traditional methods. If a person suffered from a bullet wound, honey or python oil would be used to heal them.

Q: What effects did the presence of weapons have on life in the LRA?

A: If you have a gun, those below you will see you as a superior. It is very rare if a subordinate disobeys you.

There were some unarmed soldiers in the LRA, but they never went to the frontline. Abductees would not be given weapons until they had gone through the standard training. However, an abduction cannot take place without arms. There would be fewer abductions if there were fewer guns. The mass abductions started when Sudan started supplying us with weapons.

Mostly the men were provided with arms. In Sudan, females were fully trained but were not active in combat – their role was to have children and maintain families, and before this to care for the wounded. The commander was the head of the family, then came the military escorts, and then the women. There is no limitation to the number of wives or children that a man can have. I came out of the LRA with five wives and nine children, all of whom are with me now.

When women were abducted, you were not permitted to sleep with them. They were first taken to Kony [Joseph Kony, the leader of the LRA, who claims to be a mystic and a prophet] for screening, and then he distributed them. Some commanders did sleep with women before they were screened by Kony – I mean, if a commander asks a woman to sleep with him, she will, even if he does not have a gun.

If you abducted a person and that person escaped, then they were supposed to be shot. Escapees were killed in front of everyone – I sometimes saw child escapees who were between 14 and 16 years old. If you escaped

successfully, they would find your family and kill them. Most abductees were afraid of trying to escape.

Q: How did you leave the LRA? How did your community respond?

A: I made contact with the Sudanese government and left the LRA on 22 June 2004. If the [Ugandan] government had not declared an amnesty, I would still be in the bush. I heard about the amnesty on the radio.

I had been in the casualty unit, after suffering a serious injury in a heavy ambush in July 1994. I was shot in the knee, and then the whole lower leg began to rot and the skin fell off. I was carried from the battlefield to Kilak [in Gulu district in northern Uganda], and in 1997, I was carried to southern Sudan. My leg was amputated in Khartoum. Most casualties went to Sudan, and all of the unit's guns were collected there.

There was no stigmatisation when I returned home. Such a response will depend on how you operated in your home area. If you have been cruel and behaved badly, then you will definitely be stigmatised by your community.

4. Links & References - Glossary

Small arms and light weapons – Small arms are designed for personal use and include revolvers and self-loading pistols; rifles and carbines; submachine guns; assault rifles; and light machine guns. Light weapons are designed to be used by several people operating as a crew and include heavy machine guns; handheld under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers; portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns and recoilless rifles; portable launchers of anti-tank missiles and rocket systems; portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems and mortars of calibres of less than 100MM.

From Small Arms Survey (2001), 'The Small Arms Survey 2001: Profiling the Problem', Oxford University Press, Oxford, and from 'Shattered Lives', Control Arms Campaign, 2003.

Legal trade – The legal trade in small arms and light weapons describes all transfers of small arms that are licensed by governments and occur within the scope of applicable local, national and international law. The legal trade is also referred to as 'licit' or 'licensed' trade.

Black market trade – The black market trade in small arms and light weapons describes all transfers that are not licensed by governments. Black market transfers of small arms are also referred to as 'illicit' trafficking or transfers.

Irresponsible – The term 'irresponsible' is used by many activists working to control the arms trade to describe recipients of weapons who may use them for nonmilitary ends. Irresponsible users are those who deploy the arms against civilians to commit human rights violations or in a way that is likely to undermine sustainable development.

Arms trade treaty

A global arms trade treaty would create legally binding arms controls and ensure that all governments adhere to the same basic international standards. Today, each conflict must be embargoed separately, and the United Nations Sanctions Committees, which oversee the embargoes, largely rely on member states to implement and monitor them. Since national controls on international arms transfers are often inadequate, arms embargoes are frequently violated, and only a handful of embargo breakers have been successfully prosecuted during the last decade.

A global arms trade treaty would make illegal the international transfer of arms to governments who would be likely to use them against civilians rather than for military objectives, as well as to undisciplined and corrupt security forces, who may use arms for extrajudicial killings and torture.

The Control Arms Campaign, jointly run by Amnesty International, International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) and Oxfam, is the leading voice in the call for an arms trade treaty. So far, more than 40 national governments, including the members of the European Union, have expressed support for such a treaty. The campaign hopes the process to implement an international treaty will be initiated during the UN's 2006 Review Conference, on the progress made in the implementation of its Programme of Action. The conference will be held in New York from 26 June to 7 July 2006.

UN Programme of Action

The 2001 United Nations conference on small arms – 'United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects' – adopted a programme of action to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

Among other things, the programme of action requires member states to put in place laws and other procedures to control production, export, import, transit and retransfer of small arms and light weapons, as well as registering, tracing and trading. Furthermore, it demands member states identify groups dealing in the

illegal arms trade, or similar activities, and to take proper action against them. The programme of action also enjoins states to ensure responsibility for all weapons held and issued by the state itself. Moreover, it requires every member state to take appropriate measures against any activity that violates a UN Security Council arms embargo.

At the regional level, the programme of action encourages member states to cooperate and create regional, legally binding instruments to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade, as well as customs cooperation and networks for transparency and information-sharing regarding small arms. In affected regions, it also advocates moratoria on the transfer and manufacture of such weapons.

Member countries are encouraged to cooperate with Interpol to identify groups and individuals engaged in the illicit trade in small arms, as well as to engage with civil society on questions of public awareness and efforts to stop this illegal trade.

The programme of action, however, does not cover control over private ownership and transfers to nonstate actors. These subjects were not agreed upon during the 2001 conference.

The process behind the programme of action started in 1997, when a UN panel of governmental experts on small arms suggested a conference on the topic. The conference was held in New York from 9-20 July 2001, where it was decided that the process should be reviewed no later than 2006. Two years later, it was followed by the First Biennial Meeting of States. The biennial meetings have been occasions to exchange information on initiatives undertaken to implement the programme of action but have no mandate to take decisions, or to negotiate new agreements. In July 2005, a second biennial meeting was held in New York. This year, the programme of action is up for review during the 2006 Small Arms Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects.

United Nations Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition

The United Nations Firearms Protocol was finalised in June 2001 and enacted on 3 July 2005, 90 days after its fortieth ratification. Prior to that, no international treaties or legal instruments regulated the illicit manufacturing and trafficking of small arms. The protocol supplements the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and member states commit to criminalise the illicit manufacture and trade of weapons, including handguns, pistols, submachine guns and light missiles.

So far, only 79 countries have signed the Firearms Protocol, and no more than 49 of them have ratified it. Sweden, the United Kingdom and Canada are among the signatories that still have not ratified the protocol. Another 113 countries yet have to sign the protocol, including the United States, France and Spain.

Regional agreements on small arms and light weapons

The United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons specifically recommends regional cooperation as a way to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms. If this trade is to be stopped, there must be both local cooperation and the harmonisation of laws. There were several regional agreements concerning small arms and light weapons before the UN conference on small arms in 2001, but even more have been enacted in recent years, especially in Africa. Currently, however, there exists no official mechanism for regional organisations to share information and exchange experiences on their work to combat the illicit trade in small arms.

Unlike the programme of action, many African regional instruments place great emphasis on civilian possession and, together with the Organisation of American States (OAS) Convention, the South African Devel-

opment Community (SADC) Protocol and the Nairobi Protocol, are legally binding. Both the SADC Protocol and the Nairobi Protocol provide for the total prohibition of civilian possession and use of all light weapons, automatic and semiautomatic rifles and machine guns.

Regional agreements in detail

Title: Inter-American Convention Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials. (CIFTA or the OAS Convention)

When: Signed 1997

Who: Organisation of American States (OAS)

Relevance: First international legally binding agreement on small arms and light weapons. Its definitions of firearms and explosives are broad, but it only targets commercial transfers and not government transfers.

Title: Programme for Preventing and Combating Illicit Trafficking in Conventional Arms

When: 1997

Who: European Union (EU)

Relevance: The programme provides a coherent framework for tackling illicit weapons trafficking but makes no provisions for reviewing, reforming or harmonising regulations among EU member states.

Title: Plan of Action to Combat Transnational Crime

When: 1997

Who: Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

Relevance: Not exactly an agreement on small arms, but it recognises small arms and light weapons as an important root of transnational crimes.

Title: Economic Community of West African States Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Small Arms and Light Weapons.

When: October 1998

Who: Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

Relevance: Mainly due to its voluntary nature, it has been criticised for being ineffective. However, in 2006 it is expected to transform to the legally binding ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons.

Title: Code of Conduct on Arms Exports

When: Adopted 1998

Who: European Union

Relevance: The code means EU governments will consult each other when considering granting export licences, especially to countries that have been denied them by other member states. However, it is not legally binding.

Title: Joint Action on Small Arms

When: Adopted 1998, amended 2002

Who: European Union

Relevance: As a joint action, it is legally binding, but it is implemented through national laws and procedures. The joint action refers to the control and registration of exports, transparency and evaluation of potential importers. The 2002 amendment included ammunition, which was not mentioned in the first version.

Title: OSCE Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons

When: 24 November 2000

Who: Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

Relevance: The OSCE document goes further than the UN Programme of Action with regard to exports control and export documentation policies, but the document is not legally binding.

Title: Brasilia Declaration

When: 24 November 2000

Who: Latin American and Caribbean States

Relevance: A declaration made at the Latin American and Caribbean states preparatory meeting for the first

UN small arms conference in 2001. It repeatedly emphasises states' rights to self-defence and thus arms procurement and measures taken on a national level.

Title: Bamako Declaration on an African Common Position on the Illicit Proliferation, Circulation and Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons.

When: 1 December 2000

Who: Organisation of African Unity (OAU)

Relevance: This declaration is not legally binding and was intended as a preparatory declaration for the UN small arms conference. It recognises that the problem of small arms must be addressed at many different levels, including local, national, regional, continental and international.

Title: Plan of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons

When: December 2000

Who: European Union

Relevance: The EU preparatory document for the UN conference on small arms. The EU plan of action also recognises that action to combat illicit trafficking cannot be restricted to national-level controls, but also extends to subregional, regional and international levels.

Title: Nadi Framework

When: 2000 (amended 2003)

Who: Pacific Islands Forum (PIF)

Relevance: Initially a preparatory document for the UN conference on small arms, but developed into a Weapons Control Bill in 2003. It seeks a common approach to weapons control in the Pacific and proposes model legislation for PIF members.

Title: The Protocol on the Control of Firearms, Ammunition and Other Related Materials in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Region

When: Concluded 2001, came into force 2004

Who: Southern African Development Community (SADC)

Relevance: Provides for the total prohibition of civilian possession and use of all light weapons, automatic and semiautomatic rifles and machine guns. There is also a technical committee on small arms for sharing best practices and other experiences.

Title: Andean Plan to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspects

When: 2003

Who: Andean Community

Relevance: Recommends member states to criminalise possession and use of all small arms and light weapons.

Title: Nairobi Protocol for the Prevention, Control and Reduction of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa

When: Signed 2004 (replaces the Nairobi Declaration of 2000)

Who: Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.

Relevance: Provides for the total prohibition of civilian possession and use of all light weapons, automatic and semiautomatic rifles and machine guns. It recognises the importance of adequate national legislation to control the possession and transfer of small arms and light weapons, as well national measures aimed at regulating manufacturers, traders, brokers and transporters and, significantly, financiers.

Links and References

The following section outlining links and references is divided into several categories.

- **Dedicated websites**
- **NGOs working extensively on small arms**
- **United Nations activities relating to small arms**
- **United Nations Programme of Action and related conferences**
- **Reports of the UN Special Rapporteur, Barbara Frey**
- **Key reports on small arms and related issues**

Dedicated Websites

Control Arms Campaign

Global campaign calling for governments to toughen up controls on the arms trade, jointly run by Oxfam, Amnesty International and the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA). Gives overview of issues and updates on campaign activities.

<http://www.controlarms.org>



IANSA - International Action Network on Small Arms

Impressively up-to-date website – run by IANSA, a global network consisting of 700 partner agencies, and one of the partners of the Control Arms Campaign – on all issues relating to small arms, with headlines, resource banks, and activists' toolkits.

<http://www.iansa.org>



Small Arms Survey

An independent research project located at the Graduate Institute of International Studies. Produces numerous publications on small arms, including the renowned Small Arms Survey Yearbooks, which are annual reviews of global small arms issues and themes.

See <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/publications.htm> for more details.

<http://www.smallarmssurvey.org>



NISAT – The Norwegian Initiative on Small Arms Transfer

Coalition of partner organisations – the International Peace Research Institute (PRIO) in Oslo, the Norwegian Red Cross and Norwegian Church Aid – that provides links, documents, and most notably several databases giving global data on the import and export of small arms. Includes an index of black market transfers and country profiles giving information about production, policy and legislation at the national level.

<http://www.nisat.org/>



SmallArmsNet.org – Arms Management in Africa

Online information portal run by the Institute for Security Studies in South Africa. Provides links to news articles on small arms, to regular bulletins from various research and nongovernmental organisations, and to a wide range of international documents pertaining to the control of small arms.

<http://www.smallarmsnet.org/>



NGOs working extensively on small arms

Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue

The Human Security and Small Arms Programme has produced a number of seminal publications on issues such as approaches to disarmament and the impact of armed violence on humanitarian operations and personnel. Also publishes quarterly bulletin on gun violence aimed at the development, humanitarian, human rights and health communities.

<http://www.hdcentre.org/About+the+programme>



Small Arms Working Group

Alliance of US-based nongovernmental organisations working together to promote change in US and international policies on small arms. Has produced particularly useful and succinct series of factsheets on various issues relating to small arms.

<http://fas.org/asmp/>



Saferworld

Key areas of work include small arms and light weapons and arms transfer control. Includes regular updates on small arms news and also has stable of publications on the topic, including a number of national surveys.

<http://www.saferworld.org.uk>



Amnesty International

A member of the Control Arms campaign, Amnesty has produced a number of publications about the problem of small arms, an issue that ties in closely with its human rights work.

<http://www.amnesty.org>



Human Rights Watch

Regularly releases statements on arms, and produces related documents.

<http://hrw.org/doc?t=arms>



Oxfam

A member of the Control Arms campaign, Oxfam has a great deal of information about the campaign to improve arms controls and has also produced a number of publications in conjunction with its Control Arms' partners.

http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_you_can_do/campaign/controlarms/index.htm

**Project Ploughshares**

Works extensively on small arms and has launched its own public awareness and education campaign, Take Action to Control Small Arms.

<http://www.ploughshares.ca/control/SALWPublic.htm>

**Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)**

Research arms transfers and arms control measures.

<http://www.sipri.org>

**United Nations activities relating to small arms:**

Disarmament and the UN general website of the UN on disarmament, includes specific information about the <http://disarmament.un.org/cab/> Department for Disarmament Affairs, and the Department's Conventional Arms Branch, the division dealing directly with small arms.

<http://disarmament.un.org/>

United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research

<http://www.unidir.org/>

Office of Drugs and Crime

<http://www.unodc.org/>

United Nations Programme of Action and related conferences**Text of the Programme of Action**

A number of publications in conjunction with its Control Arms' partners.

<http://disarmament2.un.org/cab/poa.html>

Original UN Conference - 2001

Website of the first UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, held July 2001.

<http://disarmament.un.org/cab/smallarms/>

First Biennial Meeting of States – 2003 Review of conference by IANSA

IANSA's assessment of the contributions made by the UN, governments and NGOs.

<http://www.iansa.org/un/bms2003.htm>

Second Biennial Meeting of States - 2005

Website of the Second Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, held July 2005.

<http://www.un.org/events/smallarms2005/>

Review Conference - 2006

Website of the 2006 Review Conference of the UN Programme of Action.

<http://www.un.org/events/smallarms2006/>

Implementing the Programme of Action – IANSA, 2003.

<http://www.iansa.org/documents/03poareport/index.htm>

Examining Implementation of the UN Programme of Action – IANSA and Biting the Bullet, 2005.

<http://www.iansa.org/un/bms2005/red-book.htm>

Reports of the UN Special Rapporteur, Barbara Frey

All of Barbara Frey's reports can be found online on the 'Small Arms and Light Weapons' section of the University of Minnesota Human Rights Program website http://hrp.cla.umn.edu/small_arms_project.html#internet : (Frey is Director of the Program).

http://hrp.cla.umn.edu/small_arms_project.html#internet

Key reports on small arms and related issues**GENERAL**

Who Takes the Bullet? The impact of small arms violence – Norwegian Church Aid, 2005

<http://english.nca.no/article/view/2381>

Shattered Lives: the case for tough international arms control – Control Arms, 2003

http://www.controlarms.com/downloads/shattered_lives.htm

Putting People First: Human Security Perspectives on Small Arms Availability and Misuse – Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2003.

<http://www.hdcentre.org/Putting+People+First+--+Publication>

Putting Guns in their Place: A resource pack for two years of action by humanitarian agencies
– Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2004.
<http://www.hdcentre.org/Putting+guns+in+their+place>

THE ARMS TRADE

Global database on arms transfers
<http://www.nisat.org/Production/worldproducers.html>
The G8: global arms exporters – failing to prevent irresponsible arms transfers --- Control Arms, 2005.
http://www.controlarms.org/find_out_more/reports/
Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations, 1997-2004 – Congressional Research Service Report, 2005.
<http://www.fas.org/man/crs/RL32547.pdf>
Dead on Time: arms transportation, brokering and the threat to human rights – Amnesty International and TransArms, 2006.
<http://www.controlarms.org/downloads/FINALtransportersandbrokersREPORTpdf.pdf%20>
The Arms Fixers: Controlling the Brokers and Shipping Agents – BASIC, NISAT and PRIO, 2003.
<http://www.nisat.org/publications/armsfixers/default.htm>

SMALL ARMS AND DEVELOPMENT

Guns or Growth? Assessing the impact of arms sales on sustainable development – Control Arms, 2004.
http://www.controlarms.org/find_out_more/reports/
Securing Development – UNDP, 2005.
http://www.undp.org/bcpr/smallarms/docs/publication_07_05.pdf
“Development Held Hostage”: Assessing the Effects of Small Arms on Human Development – UNDP, 2002.
<http://www.nisat.org/Small%20Arms%20and%20Development/Development%20Held%20Hostage%20UNDP%20Report.pdf>
Why Fighting Crime can Assist Development in Africa : Rule of Law and Protection of the Most Vulnerable – UNODC, 2005
http://www.unodc.org/pdf/ART_publication.pdf
Humanitarianism Under Threat: The Threat of Small Arms on Human Development – Small Arms Survey and Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (Robert Muggah and Eric Bernan), 2001
<http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/copublications/DevlpmntHeldHostage.2002.pdf>

IMPACT OF SMALL ARMS ON WOMEN

The impact of guns on women’s lives– Control Arms, 2005
http://www.controlarms.org/find_out_more/reports/

IMPACT OF SMALL ARMS ON CHILDREN

Tageting Children: Small Arms and Children in Conflict – Rachel Stohl, Senior Analyst, Center for Defense Information, 2002
<http://www.watsoninstitute.org/bjwa/archive/9.1/SmallArms/Stohl.pdf>
Forgotten Casualties of War: Girls in armed conflict – Save the Children, 2005
http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/temp/scuk/cache/cmsattach/2698_GAAF%20report.pdf
The Impact of Conflict on Children – the role of small arms – Julia Freedson, in Disarmament Forum, 2002
<http://www.unidir.org/pdf/articles/pdf-art1730.pdf>
Neither War Nor Peace: International comparisons of children and youth in organized armed violence – Luke Downdney.
http://www.coav.org.br/publique/cgi/cgilua.exe/sys/start.htm?sid=104&UserActiveTemplate=_en

IMPACT OF SMALL ARMS ON HUMANITARIAN WORKERS

No Relief: Surveying the Effects of Gun Violence on Humanitarian and Development Personnel
– Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2005
<http://www.hdcentre.org/In+the+Line+of+Fire>

There are also a large number of published reports on the prevalence of small arms and/or the impact of gun-related violence in different countries around the world. These can easily be located by searching for “small arms” and the country in question.

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