

Preface

Conventional weapons systems, so decisive in conflicts where military is pitched against military, have little real effect in maintaining the security of civilian populations during and after wars. The majority of casualties, of abuses of authority and of indiscriminate killings are caused by the availability and use of small arms.

The untold violence inflicted upon the individuals who make up our stricken societies and the harm suffered by them as a result is, in the main, caused by the excess of these accessible, cheap and easily replicated weapons. Since small arms and light weapons, which include landmines, machine guns, grenades, pistols and rocket launchers, are standard issue during violent conflict and are not normally controlled during post-conflict processes, the potential of these weapons for illegal use — and abuse — is substantial. Because conflict resolution processes depend on socio-economic development, effective democracy and security (as seen in a credible law and order structure), these remedies require time and stability for their successful implementation. If there is indiscriminate access to the tools of violence (i.e., weapons), stability will be harder to maintain and development in time of peace will not take place.

Connections between the legal trade in conventional arms and the illegal proliferation of light weapons, both within and outside a nation-state, are not difficult to find. Many of the weapons that flow uncontrolled through poorly supervised borders in the Balkans, Africa, Asia and Latin America are remnants of the vicious circle engaged in arming ideologically opposed factions during the Cold War era.¹ The uncontrolled and unregulated flow of light weapons liberated from its political setting as a result of peace² has now found an eager client base among bandits, international criminals and corrupt security personnel. More often than not, these weapons are also the ones used indiscriminately for settling scores and for the triumph of intolerance in divided, competitive societies.

Thus, flooding a country or region with conventional weapons systems and easily portable light weapons, which often figure as unaccounted for bonuses to clinch bigger weapons sales, has generated outright civil war (as in Angola and the former Yugoslavia and, to a lesser degree, Kashmir);

collapse of fragile states (as in Somalia and Liberia); mass killings of the innocent (as in Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia and Cambodia); and international confrontation (as in Kuwait). The paradox is that when the international community wishes to prevent or reduce the humanitarian crises resulting from civil wars and failed states, it is often deterred from timely action by the existence of massive amounts of light weapons which can be as easily obtained as they are thoughtlessly employed (as in Albania). Even if a peace process succeeds in restoring order in such a situation, the greatest threat to peace building is this same availability of weapons and the problems associated with their collection, counting and destruction.³

Seldom, if ever, have all weapons been collected at the end of an armed struggle.⁴ The insecurity prevailing in countries in transition (which are either entering the final stages of a collapsed state or are emerging from anarchy and war) provides conditions ideal for the maintenance and acquisition, by the community at large, of light weapons in general and small arms in particular. Physical security, primacy and economic necessity generate the force that propels the trade in small arms;⁵ a trade that no longer requires a new influx of weapons to be destabilising. It depends instead on the constant, ever-widening circles of distribution of the massive stocks already in existence.⁶

In countries which are in a downward spiral towards anarchy, or have already failed, the weak, the strong and the corrupt have a common need to possess arms to guarantee self-defence, maintain an advantage, or exploit a situation. By contrast, in countries emerging from conflict, ownership of weapons is motivated neither by security nor primacy, but by economic imperatives. Impoverished groups of people, insecure about their own potential for economic development and survival, utilise weapons as if they were cheque-books: robbing to supply basic needs, and/or exchanging guns for money or goods (as in Mozambique).

Whatever the reasons populations under threat have for acquiring light weapons, the results are the same: an increase in lawlessness, crime, banditry and the flooding of neighbouring regions with illegal weapons which produces political instability, intolerance and opens the door for the operation of criminal organisations. Internal instability, in turn, often encourages governments to budget for more police, more military controls and more equipment. Revenue which could be used for development is

targeted for security, and the need for increased policing and security often leads to repression, human rights abuse and corruption. Excess of weapons without proper regulation and control often leads to an increase in international tension. Whether national or international in character, tensions occasioned by the existence of large numbers of light weapons are very real. The circle between legal security concerns, the acquisition of major conventional arms and the proliferation of light weapons is thus complete.

The Towards Collaborative Peace Project at the Institute for Security Studies

One of the legacies of conflict in Southern Africa is the glut of light weapons and small arms. These weapons are being transported illegally across borders, where they are used to generate political instability and an increase in crime in many settlements, rural and urban, in the region. Under these circumstances, democratisation programmes (which include demobilisation, disarmament and policing) are being jeopardised to the point that most people feel the need to acquire weapons for self-defence, thus consolidating the illegal markets that thrive on such instability, chaos and fear. In consequence, communities have abandoned their traditional, negotiated mechanisms of conflict-resolution and conflict-management, seeking instead to resolve violent situations with solutions equally violent.⁷ Although in its infancy, a culture of violence has begun to emerge in the region, threatening democracy and development as a result. This is inevitable because an increased availability of unregulated and uncontrolled light weapons in a national society changes its individuals, making them more insecure — not less — and more violent, and its value system.

The connection between despair, violence and intolerance and the increased availability of small arms is, and will continue to become, ever more apparent in the daily lives of populations. And since this connection is a product of the unholy alliance between conflict, international crime, black markets and guns, the international community will have no choice but to accept that the control and regulation of trafficking in light weapons has become a matter of equal, if not higher, concern than arms control of a different kind.

Besides, while there is a market for light weapons, there will always be one for major conventional weapons, since the destabilisation wrought by the former, generates the need for increased protection and increased control, which is reflected in increases in military and security budgets. None the less, though there are clear linkages in the consequences of trading in various types of weapons, there is one overwhelming difference: while the trade in major conventional weapons is considered national in character and international in consequence, the proliferation of light weapons, both legal and illegal, is international in character and national in consequence. The solution to the problem of light weapons proliferation should, therefore, also be perceived as international; not regarded as manageable by means of national regulation and enforcement only.

With this context in mind, the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in South Africa has developed its *Towards Collaborative Peace* (TCP) project which aims to study the dynamics of the illegal trade in small arms in Southern Africa. In the course of this study, the TCP project will demonstrate the linkages between an increased availability of small arms and the emergence of a culture of violence in transit and end-user societies. The countries in the geographic region chosen⁸ manifest a number of similarities which permit their linkage for the purpose of this study. Thus, all countries analysed are either victims of the violence accompanying small arms proliferation or act as transit points from where weapons are distributed further afield. Likewise, all have been affected, to a greater or lesser extent, by the existence of porous borders which connect them to nation-states that have accumulated a massive surplus of light weapons as a result of decades of internal strife and ill-managed disarmament operations during multinational peace processes (i.e., Angola, Mozambique). A final point of connection is that all countries in the study are members of the same regional and sub-regional organisations, namely the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

The project, therefore, seeks to discover what is the nature of the small arms proliferation problem in all of these countries; how increased availability of weapons is affecting the societies; and what structures within existing regional groupings could be utilised to diminish the flow and effects of light weapons proliferation in Southern Africa. Furthermore, the project seeks to implement a south-south approach in dealing with this issue by contrasting

the existing trends in Southern Africa with other regions in the South. The southern part of South America was chosen as a viable comparative structure for a number of reasons. The countries chosen (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay) have a certain number of common problems similar to those of Southern Africa, namely:

- a recent return to democratic processes and the end of external conflict;
- regional disparity in indigenous production facilities for military equipment, including small arms and ammunition;
- the existence of non-state actors, specialising in distribution and circulation of illegal goods, including drugs and light weapons; and
- membership in the same regional and sub-regional organisations (the Organisation of American States and the Southern Common Market or MERCOSUR).

Both regions, moreover, are under pressure for reasons of socio-economic development. This influences their need to open borders and allow for the easy access of goods and people between member-states at a time when reduced internal security threats have lowered the capability of all countries for effective policing.

The TCP project has a series of components of which the most important are field research, and the publication of a series of books and monographs, the end result of which will be to propose viable mechanisms for both the regional control of weapons flows and the reversal of a culture of violence at local level.

The main purpose of the field research is to establish what the impact of ineffectual demobilisation and disarmament is in countries such as Mozambique and Angola; and what the effects are of the resulting excess of weapons on the surrounding countries. Particular attention is being focused on the way the light weapons, available in such massive amounts, pervert the societies through which the weapons transit in order to determine if a culture of violence follows in the wake of such indiscriminate proliferation of light weapons. The examples uncovered in the field research so far touch upon such diverse societal elements as demobilised soldiers, refugees and other migrant communities, rural communities and urban populations of Southern Africa.

Demobilised soldiers: Traditionally accepted as one of the most violent elements of society, demobilised soldiers, who in some cases are little more than children, have only one skill and know only one livelihood: the gun. Ineffectual quartering and demobilisation during peace processes have often led entire platoons to defect, transferring their military structure to crime. In Angola, the countryside between Luanda and Kuito⁹ and the coastal strip linking Luanda to Benguela and Namibe are terrorised by such militarily organised, armed groups. In situations such as this, it is insufficient simply to inform people that they are no longer in the service of an army. Without job alternatives, retraining, adequate compensation and disarmament, men and boys will hold on to their guns, using them as an unlimited source of wealth and power, no longer for ideological purposes, but for personal survival. Clashes between these armed groups and rural communities are perhaps the worst type of emerging conflict. They lead otherwise innocent villagers to arm themselves in self-defence and to foster a culture of intolerance towards outsiders.

Refugees and displaced people: An element radically different from that of demobilised soldiers is that of refugee communities. When situations in the rural countryside become untenable, because of the abuse of power in the hands of a few or for other imperatives of survival, the first wave of migration targets the urban areas as a source of security and opportunity. The flooding of cities with migrant communities can lead to an increase in crime, repression and growing intolerance between locals and newcomers. When this new source of income and security becomes sterile and dangerous, the migration pattern takes the refugee community abroad. And, as these refugees progress from a bad to a worse situation, they develop those survival skills often associated with the possession, trading and use of guns. Sometimes too refugees feel the need for developing a micro-enterprise for military supplies: home-made guns where there is a monopoly on real ones, or home-made ammunition where real cannot easily be found.

Rural communities: There are urban populations and rural communities who, even if they succeed in not being disrupted by events around them, are yet profoundly affected by gun-related violence. Peace in Mozambique without adequate disarmament and demobilisation structures has initiated a massive influx of guns across borders, flowing to the north to feed the ethnic conflict in the Great Lakes region and to the south to feed the growing black markets of Southern Africa.¹⁰

If at first the flood of weapons was linked to individuals selling single weapons for food or commodities, it was not long before the business of weapons smuggling became an organised one. The main groups conducting the business were a reflection on how ineffectually the demobilisation of soldiers was being carried out, and how inadequately security officials were being paid. Since the border with South Africa was more heavily defended than that of other countries, the effects of the gun trading businesses have been more serious in the rural communities of countries such as Swaziland.

Urban populations: Amongst urban populations, a similar process is at work, transforming societies. Since the increased availability of small arms in cities such as Maputo, Windhoek, Luanda and Johannesburg, to name but a few, there has been a concomitant increase in the cities' violence, gangsterism and intolerance. From the AK-47 violence of the taxi wars in South Africa, which represents the degeneration of the concept of free enterprise and legal competition, to the pistol-wielding thug in Maputo and Luanda, easy access to guns has reduced the power of the state to control violence, has led to the flight of income earners from the inner city to the suburbs and has increased the levels of random violence. But the phenomenon of urban, gun-related violence in itself points to further erosion of societies at large. Above all, it robs societies of hope and of the belief in a common future, undermining efforts at development and progress.

If the TCP project's field research is beginning to show why light weapons should be more effectively controlled in Southern Africa, its publications highlight the underlying reasons for the occurrence of the proliferation of light weapons, the present dynamics of light weapons proliferation and the way in which existing regional structures could be used to stem the flows. There are four books in the TCP project series, and a number of monographs. The books, of which this is the first volume, serve to highlight a number of critical issues. Thus Volume One, *Society Under Siege: Crime, Violence and Illegal Weapons*, looks at the global environment in which the proliferation of weapons occurs and the causes for such a proliferation in Southern Africa; Volume Two will analyse the existing regional mechanisms that might be utilised as control vehicles for stemming the proliferation of light weapons in Southern Africa; and Volume Three will look at the culture of violence which has emerged as a result of ineffectual

controls and easy availability of light weapons in the region. The final volume will produce a series of recommendations for improvement of control mechanisms at regional level and for reversal of the culture of violence locally.

To accompany the set of books, the project is publishing a series of monographs. These are designed to produce a comprehensive view of the actual status of small arms proliferation nationally and to cover general issues which are relevant to the ultimate recommendations of the entire project. Thus the monograph series includes work on the status of weapons flows in Namibia, Angola, Botswana, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Mozambique and Swaziland; as well as the status of arms flows in the four MERCOSUR countries of South America. Other issues which will be covered in the monograph series include the record of gun buy-back programmes; the evolution of regional and international arms control initiatives for stemming light weapons proliferation; and comparative legislation for firearm licensing. All publications reflect, to a lesser or greater degree, specific issues which define or influence the proliferation of light weapons, as well as looking at the potential that local communities and regional organisations have for limiting and controlling the proliferation of light weapons and its effects.

Since the project brings applied research to the field of light weapons control, it does not stop at field research and writing. Two further components of the project deal with proposing specific recommendations for application at the levels of regional organisation and local community. The channel for implementing the first type of recommendation is a set of workshops and conferences designed as inter-agency discussions between point persons dealing with weapons control at national and regional levels (including a south-south conference, where lessons learnt in border control application will be compared and contrasted). The second type of recommendation focuses on the creation of an educational package to be applied by local communities for the reversal of a culture of violence that has been radically influenced by the use of firearms. This package will be implemented via a pilot project set up in the inner city of Johannesburg and in an appropriate rural community in the Gauteng area of South Africa. These urban and rural models for the control of weapons and the reversal of the culture of violence will be observed and documented and the results will

be included in the last volume in the *Towards Collaborative Peace* book series.

Finally, the project will strive to increase its networks for dissemination of results, linking with similar projects for small arms control and preventative diplomacy in Africa. In this way, and by covering the region of Southern Africa, the ISS will contribute to a broader understanding of the dynamics of crime, guns and violence throughout Africa. Similar efforts by other organisations are underway to cover the sub-region of the Horn of Africa, West Africa and Central Africa. By linking our Southern African results to those of other projects in other regions, a broader understanding of the problem throughout the continent of Africa might emerge and solutions be found.

This project, therefore, is a first look at a complex problem, one that is so multi-layered that decision makers often are deterred from taking effective action. In gaining some understanding of certain aspects of the problem of the proliferation of small arms, the ISS, through its TCP project, hopes to highlight the nature of the problem and to offer insights for its resolution.

Virginia Gamba

Halfway House, September 1997

Endnotes

- 1 For Latin America, see M Klare and D Andersen, *The Scourge of Guns: The Diffusion of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Latin America*, Arms Sales Monitoring Project, Federation of American Scientists, Washington DC, 1996. For Asia, see C Smith, *The Diffusion of Light Weapons in South Asia*, in *London Defence Review*, 19, Centre for Defence Studies, London, October 1993. For the Balkans see UNIDIR, *Managing Arms in Peace Processes: Croatia and Bosnia/Herzegovina*, UNIDIR, Geneva, 1995. For Southern Africa, see G Oosthuysen, *Small Arms Proliferation and Control in Southern Africa*, SAIIA Southern Africa Series, Johannesburg, 1996.
- 2 See J Potgieter's chapter in this volume for graphic examples of peace without disarmament in Africa.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 See the UN Institute for Disarmament Research series *Managing Arms during Peace Processes*, a series of thirteen publications including analyses and case studies of major multinational peace support operations which have dealt with disarmament issues. Published by the UN Institute for Disarmament Research, Geneva, 1995-1997.

- 5 As exemplified in J Boutwell *et al.*, Lethal Commerce: The Global Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons, American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1995; and in J Singh (ed.), Light Weapons and International Security, Indian Pugwash Society and British American Security Information Council, New Delhi, 1995.
- 6 As demonstrated in T Naylor's chapter in this volume.
- 7 A case in point is the province of KwaZulu-Natal. See P Batchelor's chapter in this volume.
- 8 South Africa, Mozambique, Swaziland, Namibia, Angola, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Zambia, and Tanzania.
- 9 Information resulting from field trips undertaken by the Towards Collaborative Peace project personnel at ISS, Halfway House, South Africa.
- 10 Observations and interviews conducted by the TCP project at ISS in the field (Maputo Province, Mozambique and Mpumalanga, South Africa).