

Preface

The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in South Africa has been running a special programme since 1996, the Arms Management Programme (AMP Programme) which has been concerned with Southern African security and development needs. There are three projects within the AMP programme, namely: the Towards Collaborative Peace project with its follow-up, The Implementation Project for containment and reduction of the proliferation of small arms in southern Africa (TCP-TIP project); the firearms project on the management of licit firearms and reduction of illicit small arms-trafficking in South Africa (FIRE project); and finally the Children in Armed Conflict project for stopping to the use and abuse of children in armed conflict in sub-Saharan Africa (ACT project).

The regional small arms reduction project (TCP-TIP project) focuses on research into the status of arms flows across borders in Southern Africa and the way in which increased availability of small arms is impacting on the culture of violence in rural and urban communities of the Southern African region. The project has produced a series of publications; maintains a specialised small arms database at the ISS; and is responsible for facilitating high level meetings between government officials, NGOs and international agencies on measures to be taken to control, limit and reduce the amount of illicit small arms-trafficking taking place across borders in Southern Africa, as well as initiatives and projects that might assist in reducing the culture of gun dependency and violence in this region. The TCP-TIP project is funded by the governments of the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland (these are the original and continuing funders to this project) and the government of Norway. Partial funding for some of the project's activities has been obtained at various times from the UK NGO, Saferworld (with the UK DFID's financial support); from the government of Canada; the government of Finland; from the Rockefeller Foundation's *Bellagio* Center in Italy; and from the French Institute of South Africa (IFAS).

The FIRE project started in 1998. It looks at ways in which licit firearms can be controlled more effectively in South Africa to prevent them from entering the illicit markets. The project also maps out patterns of illicit small

arms-trafficking in South Africa and attempts short and medium term efforts at reducing the local demand for arms through education projects and campaigns. The project is funded by the following: for salary replacement and activities of the education component, the governments of the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and Norway; for field research activities and for the education component, the European Union and the Secretariat for Safety and Security (with UNDOCC and UK DFID's funding components). Finally, some in-kind support was received from the government of Canada.

The Children in Armed Conflict Project (ACT project) started in 1998. Its aims are threefold: to document the use and abuse of children in armed conflict in sub-Saharan Africa; to interact with organisations that have a similar objective world-wide; and to facilitate discussions of agencies, governments and NGOs operating in Africa and elsewhere on policy and research needs critical to the reversion of the exploitation of children by and in armed conflict. The ACT project seeks to raise public awareness on this issue and attempts to produce visual and written documentation that will testify to the need for public action. The main objective of ACT is to facilitate policy regarding action to stop the practice with particular reference to Africa. The Embassy of Norway in South Africa funds the ACT project in its entirety.

Currently, the research undertaken by AMP aims to inform the debates on firearms control, disarmament and community-based responses to firearm proliferation. Earlier research undertaken by AMP focused on work demonstrating that small arms were indeed an area of concern, due to their lethality, accessibility, prolific numbers, durability and light weight, all of which made this matériel instrumental in sustaining low-intensity intrastate conflict. Specific attention was given to the causes and nature of proliferation. More recently, the research undertaken by AMP has tried to outline best practices and policy options available for addressing the arms problem holistically. Restructuring within the AMP programme mirrored the recommended approach towards curtailing the small arms problem. The disarmament aspects considered the drying up, or reduction of the existing pool of weapons; the supply control aspects attempted to limit the growth of the existing pool; and the demand reduction aspects aimed at reducing the demand for weapons.

In 2000, AMP has taken on a new project together with the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). The OAU/ISS project on small arms and Africa aims at facilitating continued debate on the small arms proliferation process and the United Nations 2001 conference on small arms.

Significant analytic research has been undertaken to inform firearm policy debate on small arms controls, especially in South Africa and Southern Africa. As a result of the need for primary research in this respect, AMP undertook a number of surveys and workshops (as summarised in chapter 4 and to be published in 2000 as a separate monograph). In addition to this, AMP has worked towards the completion of the TCP series, *Society under siege*. This work has been a progressive framing of the debate on dealing with the problems caused by firearms in the 1990s and an explication of how they impact on Southern Africa. The series has provided all the information necessary for generating an holistic approach to weapons and has used the case study of South Africa.

The *Society under siege* series comprises three volumes which outline, “why light weapons should be more effectively controlled in Southern Africa ... 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.”¹ As a series, *Society Under Siege* represents an umbrella of thought on small arms, tracking the debate from the comparative international initiatives, through regional policy options, to the South African reality. It shows the link between crime and small arms (Volume 1); it accesses the structures that are in place in Africa and South Africa to prevent and combat illicit trafficking (Volume 2); and, finally, it makes the connection between legal weapons, illegal weapons and the culture of violence on a national level (Volume 3). This information provides a comprehensive overview of the information needed to address the problems of small arms in the case study of South Africa.

The first volume in the series, *Society under siege: Crime, violence and illegal weapons*, considered the international environment which contributed to and permitted the uncontrolled increase in weapons, and the causes of their proliferation in Southern Africa. This environment was influenced by the destabilising role of transnational organised crime and the

declining authority of the state,² as discussed by Williams, as well as the growth of intrastate conflict and the factors contributing to this rise, and the disintegration of supply-side controls, as examined by Naylor, who states: “[t]he glut of weapons, contained politically by the realities of the international context of the Cold War, was freed from its constraints in the 1990s as a direct result of the changing international environment.”³

The second volume in the series, *Society under siege: Licit responses to illicit arms* shows “a number of recent international and regional approaches taken by organisations to make the curbing of small arms proliferation conceivable within their frames of reference.”⁴ This is based on the finding that the dynamics of small arms proliferation is so complex that “it will be difficult to generate a single international initiative that will mobilise all others for the resolution of the problem.”⁵ The volume presents an overview of the international initiatives on small arms, especially the efforts of the UN. As comparative examples, initiatives within the OAS and the OAU are considered for their potential to address small arms proliferation. At a Southern African subregional level, the mandate for action on small arms is considered with regard to SADC and subregional groupings, namely the ISDSC and SARPCCO. The focus of the volume is on Southern Africa and it looks at “the interpretation of the regional views and needs in respect to light weapons proliferation ... [and] at existing mechanisms for joint action that can be enhanced to accommodate the issue of arms control.”⁶

This third and final volume in the series, *Society under siege: Managing arms in South Africa*, looks at the issue of small arms within South Africa. It considers the dilemma presented by the circulation of firearms and the transitional state of these weapons as they move within a single life cycle from legal to illegal. How this contributes to and perpetuates the cycle of violence in Southern Africa, and possible policy controls and community-based initiatives that could curb this also come under discussion.

Section 1 of Volume III considers the nature and extent of the circulation of firearms within Southern Africa, and the transition between legal and illegal firearms. In Chapter 1, Meek outlines the international context in which firearm proliferation occurs. She identifies the end of the Cold War as a key determinant for Africa, following the inevitable dumping of weapons on the continent – although this was a characteristic feature of conflict in Africa

prior to that. She focuses on the regional flow of weapons within Southern Africa, outlining the source, transit and end-user countries. Due to the durability of firearms, the life span of a weapon may be many decades. Tracking the flow of weapons outlines their transition from legal to illegal status, as they move from one context and possessor to another. Meek demonstrates this by citing a number of examples of these flows in Southern Africa. In Chapter 2, Hennop grapples with the problem of illegal firearms in circulation. He outlines the sources of illegal firearms, diagrammatically plotting the flows of firearms in Southern Africa.

Section II of Volume 3 considers the extent of legal firearm ownership in South Africa and possible policy and legislative controls on legal firearms. It presents an overview of the main findings from research to inform the national policy debate. In Chapter 3, Meek considers the extent of legal firearm ownership in South Africa. She argues that, while it is often claimed that targeting legal owners of firearms as a means of addressing the proliferation of illegal firearms is frequently thwarted, since it is regarded as unnecessary and misguided, yet the information provided on civilian-owned firearms in South Africa and the role such weapons play in violent crime, as well as in accidental death and suicides, argues to the contrary. Meek also provides an analysis of the shortcomings of the current legislation and policy governing the civilian possession of firearms in South Africa, with a view to identify the steps that can be taken to impact on efforts to reduce gun-related crime and violence in the country. In Chapter 4, Hansmann and Hennop consider the findings of research conducted by AMP to inform the drafting of national firearm policy. In five workshops attended by members of the Illegal Firearms Investigation Units (FIUs), support was given for tightening existing controls over firearms. In a docket analysis of 788 firearm-related dockets, the misuse and poor control of firearms and the investigative capacity of the SAPS pointed to the need for better controls. Finally, in an audit on the accuracy of the Central Firearm Registry (CFR), it was found that three in ten licence holders have correct information on record. To redress this, policy needs to ensure a registration process under which law enforcement personnel can trace firearm licence holders.

Section III of this publication considers the culture of violence within South Africa and how firearms contribute to fuel this culture. It examines the findings of a survey commissioned in the Lekoa/Vaal area, south of

Johannesburg, that aimed to obtain information to inform the design of a community-based strategy to reduce firearm dependency. It provides insight into the type of information that could inform the design of community-based initiatives to reduce firearm penetration and firearm dependency. In Chapter 5, Cock posits the idea of violence in South Africa as identity-based. She argues that the demand for small arms is socially constructed and embedded in various social practices and cultural forms. Any solution to the proliferation of guns has to deal with these social relations and contested identities. Both Meek and Hansmann consider the findings of the Lekoa/Vaal community survey. In Chapter 6, Meek presents an overview of the findings of the survey of the Lekoa/Vaal community, noting, at last, a strong community support for better firearm controls. In order to combat crime and violence in South Africa, a twin approach of government and community working in parallel is recommended. In Chapter 7, Hansmann considers which elements of the survey could inform the design of community-based initiatives to reduce firearm dependency.

Section IV considers the role of civil society in the control of firearms, presenting two cases. In Chapter 8, Gun Free South Africa outlines its role in the control of firearm proliferation and the reversal of the culture of violence. In Chapter 9, the South African Gunowners Association puts its case on the control of light weapons. Civil society needs to contest government with regards to their actions on firearm controls in order to ensure accountability and transparency.

The Conclusion, informed by the opinion of the various contributions, and aware of the current debate surrounding the adoption of new firearm legislation, formulates policy for new firearm control legislation in South Africa. The aim is to ensure more responsible firearm ownership, and control between the licit and illicit arms flows.

The process of completion of this final volume has been hampered by the delay in the promulgation of the new firearm control policy within South Africa. Civil society and state actors in the country have hotly debated the content and structure of the new firearm control bill. Although the South African cabinet has approved the firearm policy (as contained in Annex 4 (see below)), the new bill will only be promulgated in 2000. The new firearm policy is long overdue, more specifically as conditions in South

Africa have altered significantly since the former *Arms and Ammunition Act* was promulgated in 1969. As South Africa moves toward adopting the new firearm legislation, the debate will shift to what constitutes the best practices for implementation and enforcement of the legislation, as well as to a critical evaluation of the implication of this policy for civil society and the control of firearms in South Africa. It is to be hoped that this series has not only created a forum for awareness concerning arms proliferation, but has helped to inform policy designed to monitor and control it.

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Endnotes

- 1 V Gamba, Preface, *Society Under Siege*, Volume I, 1997, p xi.
- 2 P Williams, Transnational organised crime and national and international security: A global assessment, *Society Under Siege*, Volume 1, chapter 1, 1997, pp11-41.
- 3 V Gamba, Conclusion, *Society Under Siege*, Volume I, 1997, p 169.
- 4 V Gamba, Introduction, *Society Under Siege*, Volume II, 1998, p 2.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 V Gamba, Introduction, *Society Under Siege*, Volume II, 1998, p 3.