

## Summary of background papers

Three background presentations related to children, youth and small arms were given at the workshop, addressing the involvement of youth in violence, the technical and legal aspects of small arms and light weapons and the impact of war on children. They are summarized below.

The causes of child and youth involvement in violence are often due to failure on the part of communities and states to protect children through the provision of rights. The social, political and economic factors that make youth vulnerable to forced or voluntary recruitment into different violent groups are similar, regardless of the size, level of organization or sophistication of the group.

Arms themselves do not cause conflict. However, access to small arms and light weapons is a driving force behind the perpetration, escalation and cyclical nature of violence on different scales. Controlling this common element in all forms of violence will reduce the impact of violent crime, gang related violence and armed conflict on children, who suffer the consequences of arms proliferation as both victims and perpetrators.

Small arms and light weapons range from revolvers to assault rifles and machine guns, while light weapons include heavy machine guns, grenade launchers and mortars less than 100mm calibre. There is estimated to be some 639 million military, police and private firearms globally. Although there are no reliable estimates on illegal numbers of weapons, the annual legal trade is worth between \$5-7bn.

Global responses to the problem include:

- UN Programme of Action on the Illicit Trafficking in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (adopted July 2002)
- UN Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition (adopted May 2002)
- UN General Assembly/Security Council resolutions
- Coordinated Action on Small Arms - CASA (UN system coordination system)
- Inter-Agency Standing Committee on Humanitarian Issues

At regional levels, trafficking of arms is linked to illicit trafficking of other goods. African governments have recognized the issue and its impact and have adopted frameworks that include the following approaches:

- Law enforcement
- Controls on civilian possession
- Post-conflict weapons collection
- Public education and awareness raising
- Supply-side controls
- Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes

These approaches are supported by regional policies and frameworks such as:

- the Bamako Declaration on an African Common Position on the Illicit Proliferation, Circulation and Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons,
- the ECOWAS Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Light Weapons,
- the Southern African Development Community Protocol on the Control of Firearms and Other Related Materials and
- the Nairobi Declaration on the Problem of the Proliferation of Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons.

A number of countries have undertaken comprehensive legal reforms, national plans of action and programmes, including post-conflict disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and weapons collection and destruction.