

SPECIAL COMMENT

Small arms and light weapons (SALW) kill and maim countless people throughout the world every year, every day. The *Small Arms Survey 2005* estimates that between 60% and 90% of direct deaths in violent conflicts are caused by small arms; these in turn are responsible for the large but undetermined number of indirect deaths that occur as the direct result of conflict. In addition, in post-conflict environments and in societies not in conflict at all, small arms play a huge role in crime, sexual violence, domestic violence, suicide and human rights abuses such as torture. The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons thus undermines development and exacerbates the vicious circle of poverty and insecurity.

Prior to the end of the Cold War, the issue of small arms and light weapons was dealt with by the arms control community under the rubric of controlling the arms trade. In 1988, under the stewardship of Directors Liviu Bota and Jayantha Dhanapala, UNIDIR published a seminal work by Christian Catrina on *Arms Transfers and Dependence* (Taylor and Francis, New York, 1988). Right on the first page of chapter 1, Catrina replicates the United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency's definition of arms transfers, which refers to "...artillery, infantry weapons, small arms, ammunition, other ordnance...".

The issue of small arms and light weapons really took hold as a matter for the UN to address, however, in the mid-1990s. Although there had been references to firearms control since the mid-1950s, SALW only became an international peace and security issue when the UN Secretary-General's 1995 supplement to the 1992 *An Agenda for Peace* mentioned small arms as a threat in post-conflict environments and pointed to the positive experience in Nicaragua in 1990, when a weapon collection programme was conducted to strengthen the new peace. As a contribution to the development of the SALW issue, under the stewardship of Director Sverre Lodgaard and Project Director Virginia Gamba, UNIDIR carried out an in-depth study of Disarmament and Conflict Resolution. The project carried out a number of key case studies and developed a practitioner's questionnaire on weapons control, disarmament and demobilization during peacekeeping operations. At the same time, UNIDIR began to involve itself in field research in West Africa, specifically participating in UN efforts in preventing conflict in Mali. This effort led to the 1996 Flame of Peace and the 1998 ECOWAS Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Light Weapons. Since that time much has happened to focus attention on the impact of the illicit trade in and misuse of small arms and light weapons. Regional, international and national initiatives have played a major role in bringing about post-conflict disarmament and arms management in vulnerable societies.

Since 2001, there has been an international framework for action to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. The UN Programme of Action has enabled resources to be targeted to countries in need, it has given authority to those attempting to reduce the impact of small arms and light weapons in their communities, and it has provided the platform for further

international, regional and national instruments. In 2005, within the framework of the Programme of Action, Member States of the UN agreed an International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons. The next step on the international agenda is to find a way to address the damage caused by illegally operating brokers of small arms and light weapons, who feed and stimulate the global, illicit small arms trade.

In 2006, the UN Programme of Action will be reviewed at an international conference in New York. Since 2001, there have been two Biennial Meetings of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action. UNIDIR, Small Arms Survey, the United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs (UNDDA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have carried out and published analyses of the reports on implementation of the Programme of Action submitted by Member States in order to monitor their progress.

We have given this issue of *Disarmament Forum* a special Geneva flavour. All the authors of the articles are UNIDIR researchers or part of UNIDIR joint projects such as the Geneva Forum—a joint project of UNIDIR, the Quaker United Nations Office and the Programme for Strategic and International Security Studies of the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva—and our numerous projects with Small Arms Survey and UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention & Recovery. It is no accident that we have decided to put a Geneva spin on the SALW issue. Geneva is a place where disarmament, humanitarian action, health, development and human rights all come together in one setting. It means that we have been able to develop an SALW dialogue here among health practitioners, humanitarian workers, human rights experts and disarmament enthusiasts through mechanisms like the Geneva Forum project and its subsidiary Geneva Process. John Borrie analyses the Geneva Forum's impact on the SALW debate and Patrick Mc Carthy analyses the UN Programme of Action Small Arms.

Under the UN Coordinating Action on Small Arms (CASA), along with our colleagues in UNDDA, UNDP and Small Arms Survey, UNIDIR has been working to promote the implementation of the Programme of Action through its reporting mechanism. Elli Kytömäki reports on the regional aspects of the Programme of Action, while Valerie Yankey-Wayne looks at the human dimension and the key role of Africa. Derek Miller and Lisa Rudnick, and Shukuko Koyama, bring us to the coalface of the impact of small arms, making sure that our work is embedded in practical reality. The legal framework at the international level, however, remains important to provide impetus, coherence and resource assistance in the field. Sarah Parker looks at what has been allowed and achieved elsewhere and asks the obvious—why not in SALW? Peter Batchelor and Glenn McDonald take us through the hard-fought tracing and marking negotiations and Christophe Carle reminds us that the omission of ammunition in the tracing and marking instrument will come back to haunt us. In failing to address the hot, live issue of ammunition we have failed to grasp the nettle: we have missed an important opportunity to make a significant difference to the devastating impact of the illicit trade in SALW and delayed the day when we shall address ammunition with the urgency it deserves.

On a completely different note, but certainly of no less importance, we are publishing a summary by Eitan Barak of a thought-provoking symposium re-evaluating Israel's non-membership of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

And finally, on behalf of everyone here at UNIDIR, I'd like to thank warmly all UNIDIR's past and present staff, Board Members, Directors and all our colleagues in the UN, in governments, universities and international and non-governmental organizations for all their support over the last 25 years. Happy Silver Anniversary to UNIDIR—now let's go for gold!

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