

GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP ON SMALL ARMS Blog post



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Identification matters: Small Arms Survey weapons ID workshops for journalists

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Acts of armed violence naturally peak our curiosity. We want to know what happened, how it happened, and why?

Some of these answers lay with the arms themselves and the ammunition that feeds them. Answers that can speak to the capabilities of the armed actor(s), and, if properly traced, to the supply sources and possible alliances that enabled the action. We need journalists to find these answers. Whether reporting directly from the battlefield or from their desks while scrutinizing images of weapons, journalists play a significant role in relating well-informed and accurate stories.

The Small Arms Survey is convinced that improved reporting on the weapons used in conflict will inform both public opinion and understanding of weapons trafficking issues, thus precipitating policy makers to develop more effective solutions to tackle them.

To help reporters in this quest, the Small Arms Survey has conducted nine journalist workshops on the nuances of weapons identification and research. Over 150 journalists have been trained in Juba, Istanbul, Belgrade, Nairobi, New York, and Tunis.

The courses are tailored for journalists working in and covering areas of violence and conflict. By providing participants with the skills and tools necessary to record and identify arms and ammunition and contextualize their significance, we help them process what they find to inform their reporting.

Our journalist workshops include training modules on the legal arms trade, the means of diversion, weapons and ammunition characteristics, field data collection techniques and safety considerations, international and regional control instruments, and important data sources for research.

We also use these workshops to develop deeper ties with the journalist community, including at the institutional level. For instance, students at Columbia Graduate School of Journalism have both participated in Small Arms Survey workshops, as well as received in-depth briefings during their classes on campus.

Judith Matloff, Lecturer, Columbia Graduate School of Journalism commented: '[The Survey] shared sites where [the students] can seek verification and provided an out-of-class exercise

to test this new investigative skill. The students will need further practice in order to master this highly specialized art. Once they become proficient I hope they will collaborate with [the Small Arms Survey] in the field, not only on deeply researched stories but also to share raw data that can be circulated more widely.'

And the results? For example, one Small Arms Survey journalist training participant published a story about Kenyan reservists dealing with livestock thieves; another wrote about how online arms sales fuel the Libyan conflict.

We very much look forward to continuing this work; to help reporters find the information that the public deserves, and to help policy makers find the answers they need to come up with solutions.

This blog post was published as part of the Global Partnership on Small Arms project, which was managed by the Small Arms Survey and funded by the German Federal Foreign Office.

The Global Partnership on Small Arms was a platform where stakeholders engaged in reducing or preventing illicit arms trafficking were able to interact; exchange information, experience, and knowledge; and give feedback to further their shared goals.

The Global Partnership was intended to build on the mutually reinforcing implementation of existing international instruments dealing with countering illicit arms trafficking (for example, the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons), promoting the regulation of the legal trade through the Arms Trade Treaty, and advancing gender equality through the Women, Peace, and Security agenda.