

# small arms survey 2006

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unfinished business



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## FOREWORD

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I became President of Africa's oldest republic in the wake of a devastating civil war that took untold numbers of lives and laid the economy to waste. Today, post-conflict Liberia is just beginning to regain some measure of social, political, and economic stability. But security, while vastly improved, remains a concern. After 14 years of armed conflict, and despite important weapons reduction efforts, Liberia remains awash with small arms.

The Small Arms Survey and others have shown that such an abundance of weapons is a recipe for trouble, especially in a region teeming with armed groups. Liberia cannot take on this challenge alone. Nor should other countries struggle with such far-reaching small arms concerns on their own.

It is in this context that I look forward to the United Nations Review Conference on Small Arms and Light Weapons in June–July 2006, during which Member States will join forces to define the next steps in the global small arms process. Undeniably, we still face huge challenges at the national, regional, and international levels.

The *Small Arms Survey 2006: Unfinished Business* explores these challenges and presents its most recent research on issues that the international community will have to grapple with if it is to make any headway in preventing the misuse of small arms. As the subtitle implies, much work remains to be done.

This volume offers initial answers in response to key questions we must continue to ask as we proceed. Why do people acquire, use, and misuse weapons? How can we measure the real costs of gun violence? What is the relationship between small arms control and reduction measures and the broader security sector picture? And regarding my own region: How can we tackle the problem of armed groups in West Africa?

Matching relevant theory with facts from the field, this book advances our understanding of the small arms issue and offers crucial insight for policy-makers and other stakeholders. I invite you to join me in using the *Small Arms Survey 2006* as a vital resource, and as an essential tool in navigating the future of the international small arms process.

**Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf**

President of the Republic of Liberia

April 2006

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## ABOUT THE SMALL ARMS SURVEY

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The Small Arms Survey is an independent research project located at the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva, Switzerland. Established in 1999, the project is supported by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, and by sustained contributions from the governments of Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. The Survey is also grateful for past and current project support received from Australia, Denmark, and New Zealand. The Small Arms Survey collaborates with research institutes and non-governmental organizations in many countries, including Brazil, Canada, Georgia, Germany, India, Israel, Jordan, Norway, the Russian Federation, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

The objectives of the Small Arms Survey are: to be the principal source of public information on all aspects of small arms; to serve as a resource centre for governments, policy-makers, researchers, and activists; to monitor national and international initiatives (governmental and non-governmental) on small arms; and to act as a clearing house for the sharing of information and the dissemination of best practices. The Survey also sponsors field research and information-gathering efforts, especially in affected states and regions. The project has an international staff with expertise in security studies, political science, law, economics, development studies, and sociology. It collaborates with a worldwide network of researchers, partner institutions, non-governmental organizations, and governments.

## NOTES TO READERS

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**Abbreviations:** Lists of abbreviations can be found at the end of each chapter.

**Chapter cross-referencing:** Chapter cross-references appear capitalized in brackets throughout the text. For example, in Chapter 10 on Armed Groups: 'In such cases, one can point to a correlation between the availability of weapons or ammunition and the degree of control exerted over them (THE LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY).'

**Exchange rates:** All monetary values are expressed in current US dollars (USD). When other currencies are additionally cited, unless otherwise indicated, they are converted to USD using the 365-day average exchange rate for the period 1 September 2004 to 31 August 2005.

**Small Arms Survey:** The plain text—Small Arms Survey—is used to indicate the overall project and its activities, while the italicized version—*Small Arms Survey*—refers to the publication. The *Survey*, appearing italicized, refers generally to past and future editions.

**Web site:** For more detailed information and current developments on small arms issues, readers are invited to visit the Small Arms Survey Web site at: <<http://www.smallarmssurvey.org>>

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Nigerians of Bakin Ciyawa, Plateau State, prepare to defend their town with locally produced hunting rifles and other weapons in May 2004.  
© Pius Utomi Ekpei/AFP/Getty Images



# Introduction

Ten years ago, the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons was far from the international community's agenda. Fewer than a handful of measures had even been instituted. One innovative practical disarmament programme was launched under United Nations auspices in Mali in 1994, at the urging of then president Alpha Oumar Konaré. Shortly thereafter, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali called attention to the need for 'practical disarmament in the context of the conflicts the United Nations is actually dealing with and of the weapons, most of them light weapons, that are actually killing people in the hundreds of thousands'.<sup>1</sup> A few experts and advocates were also drawing attention to small arms issues, but their work was only beginning.<sup>2</sup>

In 2006, the picture looks very different. Dozens of practical initiatives have been launched, ranging from projects to disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate ex-combatants in post-conflict zones, to measures to improve the security of government stockpiles, to large-scale destruction of surplus weapons stocks, and the negotiation of an international instrument for the marking and tracing of weapons. Innovative projects to improve local security and safety have now been established in Albania, Australia, Brazil, El Salvador, Fiji, South Africa, and countless communities around the world. International organizations as diverse as the World Health Organization, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development have acknowledged the importance of small arms and armed violence issues to their work, and the need to devote adequate financial and human resources to the issue. More than 700 non-governmental organizations in all corners of the world are active on the issue.

These steps have only scratched the surface of the problems posed by small arms proliferation and misuse. But compared to the situation only a decade ago, progress has been enormous. Our understanding of small arms and armed violence issues has grown significantly, and we now know much about the global distribution of victims of armed violence, the negative impact of arms availability and misuse on social and economic development, the worldwide nature of stockpiles and holdings, and the critical importance of embedding small arms work in the broader context of armed violence reduction and security sector reform initiatives.

But we have not yet done much to reduce the human cost of armed violence.

Agreement in 2001 on the United Nations *Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects* was an important achievement. By itself, if fully implemented, the *Programme of Action* would represent significant progress, and the first step states must take at the UN Review Conference in 2006 is to commit to its full implementation.

Stopping there, however, would mean refusing to recognize that our understanding of key elements of the small arms agenda has grown since 2001. Over the past five years, issues such as the threat posed by the proliferation of man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS), the importance of ammunition as the 'fuel' that fires contemporary conflicts, the need to match supply-side initiatives with demand reduction measures, and the link between small arms proliferation and misuse, development, and broader security sector governance have only just begun to be tackled. Whatever their fate at the Review Conference, these issues, with which the *Programme of Action* does not deal in detail, represent key future challenges.

### Chapter highlights

The publication of the first *Small Arms Survey* coincided with the 2001 UN Small Arms Conference and the adoption of the *Programme of Action*. This edition, the sixth, continues in the tradition of its predecessors by offering new information and insight on both emerging and established small arms issues. Its aim is not to sum up or take stock of past efforts, but instead to advance existing knowledge wherever possible. This year's *Survey* offers new or updated information on small arms production, stockpiles, transfers, and measures, including a review of important international developments such as the *International Tracing Instrument*.

The second part of this year's *Survey* concentrates on some of the challenges that are essential to future progress on the small arms issue. Thematic chapters and case studies examine the demand for weapons, the gender dimension of perpetrators of armed violence, small arms and security sector reform, and the economic costs of small arms use. While anchored in particular chapters, our cross-cutting themes are further explored throughout the volume. A case in point is the issue of demand, whose core aspects are presented in a dedicated chapter. In addition, the Production chapter uses a demand-side approach in estimating global military procurement of small arms and light weapons, while the Papua New Guinea, Lord's Resistance Army, and Armed Groups chapters highlight the need to take demand into account in crafting effective armed violence prevention strategies. These chapters also address the difficulties of curbing demand for the acquisition and use of guns in regions awash with weapons. Similarly, we recognize that a thorough understanding of small arms violence—and its antidotes—requires examining perpetrators of armed violence based on gender and age. The Angry Young Men chapter considers why young men account for the lion's share of global small arms violence, while the Colombia study highlights the gender-specific nature of gun violence in that country.

### Update chapters

**Chapter 1 (Production):** Using a demand-side approach, this chapter estimates procurement of small arms and light weapons by the world's armed forces, as well as the numbers of weapons that must be produced or transferred from surplus stocks to meet these needs. The chapter uses data on troop levels and ages of small arms in 151 countries as well as detailed information on procurement patterns for 32 of those states.

The results of this projection suggest that the world's militaries procure around one million small arms and light weapons annually. Of these, an estimated 0.7 to 0.9 million are newly produced weapons and the remainder are surplus weapons, transferred from one state to another. The chapter highlights one major trend of concern: a number of wealthy states seem set to launch new procurement initiatives in the coming five to ten years. Global military production will meet this increased demand and other countries will seek parity with these modernizing militaries. Large amounts of surplus small arms and light weapons will thus become available. The potential for a cascade effect, whereby surplus stocks are displaced from richer states to poorer ones, or to non-state armed groups, is great.

**Chapter 2 (Stockpiles):** In reviewing the global distribution of firearms among law enforcement agencies and armed forces around the world, this chapter develops holdings estimates for these categories of ownership. It also points to the danger of catastrophic loss of control over large stockpiles and the constant problem of routine theft from state-run small arms inventories.

The chapter estimates the global inventory of law enforcement firearms at more than 26 million weapons. Militaries worldwide hold at least 200 million modern firearms, of which the large majority are automatic rifles. Armed forces also store large numbers of older weapons. Global military firearm inventories are concentrated among relatively few countries, with just ten countries controlling around two-thirds of the weapons. Governments have officially declared a total of only 16 million military-held firearms, less than ten per cent of the estimated total.

**Chapter 3 (Transfers):** In addition to providing new information on major exporters and importers and an updated Small Arms Trade Transparency Barometer, this chapter features a case study on illicit small arms and light weapons transfers in South America based on police and customs seizure data.

In 2003, the top exporters of small arms and light weapons—based on customs data from UN Comtrade, national arms export reports, and estimates—were the Russian Federation, the United States, Italy, Germany, Brazil, and China. The top importers—based on customs data—were the United States, Cyprus, and Germany.

As the case of South America illustrates, harmonization of national laws is crucial since criminals often exploit legal loopholes of neighbouring countries to purchase and smuggle small arms across national borders.

**Chapter 4 (Measures):** Since December 2005, UN Member States have been bound by the *International Tracing Instrument*. The result of intense negotiations, it reflects a series of compromises, the foremost of which is that the *Instrument* is only politically, not legally, binding. Nor does it cover small arms and light weapons ammunition. Despite these compromises, the *International Tracing Instrument* constitutes a significant step forward in multilateral efforts to address the small arms problem.

This chapter explores the contents of the *Instrument*, highlighting the contribution it makes to the international regulation of marking, record-keeping, and tracing. It is too early, however, to proclaim the UN tracing process a success; this will depend on the effective implementation of the *Instrument* by UN Member States, as well as the extent to which it spurs further normative development. In late 2005, many states had yet to determine how to bring national laws and practices into compliance.

## **Thematic chapters and case studies**

**Chapter 5 (Cambodia):** Cambodia was awash with weapons during the 1990s, following several decades of conflict. In recent years, the international community, the Cambodian government, and non-governmental organizations have collaborated to address the problem through specific small arms control programmes. As a result, more than 120,000 weapons have been removed from uncontrolled circulation, and 180,000 confiscated and surplus stockpiles have been destroyed. National firearms laws have also been revised and widespread public awareness campaigns have made the Cambodian people conscious of new policies regarding gun possession and use.

Based on newly collated data, this chapter provides the first assessment of the impact of these programmes, concluding that they have contributed to a considerable improvement in human security for the Cambodian people. Yet this picture, positive as it appears, is incomplete. The chapter looks beyond small arms control to consider broader approaches to post-conflict stabilization, in particular security sector reform (SSR). It concludes that opportunities to link the two agendas in Cambodia have largely been unexploited. The continuing misuse of official weapons in Cambodia underlines the utility of incorporating SSR concepts into small arms planning.

**Chapter 6 (Demand):** This chapter finds that a careful treatment of the motivations and means that condition acquisition and possession of firearms is as important as supply-side interventions that regulate manufacturing, transfer, and civilian possession. Interventions are most likely to prove sustainable when they are tailored to the particular circumstances of groups and individuals and when they involve public–private partnerships.

Drawing on field research carried out in Brazil, Colombia, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and South Africa, the chapter reveals a number of cross-cutting factors that must be taken into account if small arms reduction and control are to be successful. Factors such as the historical and social environment help shape collective and individual preferences to acquire and possess firearms, as do dramatic structural shifts in governance and the macro-economy. Moreover, the sudden and unexpected availability of weapons in a volatile environment can also induce demand by lowering the real and relative price of acquiring weapons.

**Chapter 7 (Papua New Guinea):** In response to chronic armed violence in its urban centres and highland provinces, the Papua New Guinea government initiated a far-reaching review of its firearms legislation and controls in 2005. Firearms, while few in number relative to the population, were found to make a major contribution to real and perceived insecurity—and pose a persistent obstacle to good governance, improved security, and sustainable development. This chapter presents the findings of an armed violence assessment administered in the country's National Capital District and Southern Highlands Province by the Small Arms Survey with support from UNDP.

Extensive household surveys reveal, for example, that victimization rates among households in the regions under review are higher than previously reported. More than half of all households surveyed reported being victimized in the preceding six months, mainly with weapons—including firearms. The chapter also observes that ammunition prices are lower than previously reported, and appear to be declining. Furthermore, the chapter finds that weapons reduction programmes do not have widespread support among the citizens, who call for improvements in law and order before they will agree to disarm.

**Chapter 8 (Costing):** This chapter examines the impact of small arms violence from an economic perspective. In developed countries, high costs are frequently used to justify more spending on violence prevention. The same is not yet true of developing countries, some of which cannot or do not provide extensive care for victims. Comparing costs with levels of armed violence can help identify in which societies victims are the most vulnerable.

Misconceptions about the costs of armed violence abound and methodologies need careful refinement to ensure a better understanding of the global costs of gun violence. Nevertheless, evidence clearly shows that small arms misuse accounts for an excessive proportion of the costs of violence. This finding is confirmed by two case studies on Brazil and Colombia, where the medical treatment of a firearm injury costs between 1.7 and 3 times more than that of a stabbing. These studies utilize draft estimation guidelines developed by the Small Arms Survey for the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

**Chapter 9 (Colombia):** This chapter reveals that violence arising from Colombia's protracted armed conflict as well as common and organized crime has claimed the lives of more than 475,000 civilians and combatants since 1979—almost 17,600 per year. More than 80 per cent of all homicides since the late 1970s have been perpetrated with guns. This percentage has steadily increased—from about 60 per cent in the 1980s to more than 85 per cent in 2002. By 2005 more than 15 per cent of *all* deaths, from any cause, were firearm-related. Criminal violence perpetrated with firearms is also gender-specific, with men suffering more than 90 per cent of all gun deaths.

Most weapons currently in circulation in Colombia are illegal and unregistered. The number of legal and illegal weapons combined is estimated at 2.3 to 3.9 million, suggesting an ownership rate of 5 to 8 firearms per 100 inhabitants. This chapter also shows that the country witnessed a significant reduction in conflict-related civilian deaths in 2003 and 2004. It provides evidence that gun control measures have been quite successful in reducing violence in major cities such as Bogotá, Cali, and Medellín.

**Chapter 10 (Armed Groups):** Armed groups, equipped mainly with small arms and light weapons, constitute a persistent and growing security threat worldwide. This chapter provides an overview of the dynamics of small arms acquisition, management, and control by armed groups (including pro-state militias) in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region, where they are a particular concern. Many West African armed groups are unpredictable, with motivations, allegiances, and scope of operations shifting over time. They tend to have easy access to the region's robust market for small arms and light weapons. Though weapons collection programmes in West Africa have had some success, the quality of weapons collected is often questionable.

The chapter finds that attempting to influence armed groups through persuasion is an important but insufficient means of engaging with West African armed groups. Since a lack of alternative employment opportunities may drive

demobilized ex-fighters to return to fighting, it will often prove more effective to offer incentives such as new jobs and security sector reform.

**Chapter 11 (Lord’s Resistance Army):** The Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) is a non-state armed group that operates in the north of Uganda and neighbouring countries. It is notorious for its abduction of children, who are forced to become fighters under unusually cruel conditions. The LRA is dependent on small arms for almost all of its violent activities. It requires few resources to sustain these, other than abducted ‘recruits’ and the small arms and ammunition with which to equip them. In a region already saturated with small arms, the well-armed LRA is able to capture additional arms, ammunition, and recruits in a self-sustaining cycle of violence.

The chapter argues that the LRA, despite reports to the contrary, does not face crippling shortages of arms or ammunition. In contrast with members of many other armed groups, LRA fighters are disciplined—albeit brutalized—into caring for their weapons and using ammunition sparingly. Small arms are a crucial determinant of the LRA’s capacity to continue fighting; their relative abundance indicates that the LRA is far from finished as a fighting force.

**Chapter 12 (Angry Young Men):** Young men account for a disproportionately high percentage of the perpetrators (and victims) of lethal small arms violence. This chapter asks what role small arms play in the lives of these ‘angry young men’ and what measures can be taken to disrupt this deadly relationship.

Biological and demographic explanations of the problem do not take into account the critical social and economic factors that appear to encourage or inhibit some young men’s recourse to violence. The chapter argues that gender identity constructions condition many marginalized young men around the world to view armed violence as a legitimate means of achieving manhood and respect. Small arms are seen as useful coercive tools, as well as powerful symbols underpinning attractive masculine identities. The chapter concludes that controlling young men’s access to small arms has proven effective in reducing firearm mortalities from youth violence. Countering socially constructed associations that link small arms to violence, power, and masculinity will also be pivotal to future violence prevention strategies.

## Conclusion

As the *Small Arms Survey* goes to press, the outcome of the UN Review Conference remains unclear. Yet whatever its results, the small arms issue will remain with us, in all of its complexity, for years to come. The international community does not yet appear ready to adopt a comprehensive and consensual approach to the many dimensions of the small arms problem. But most practical measures to promote greater security and safety from armed violence only require greater and sustained efforts at the local, community, national, or regional level, with effective partnerships among NGOs, aid agencies, international organizations, and governments. The Small Arms Survey, for its part, will continue to support a diverse range of initiatives while pointing the way to workable solutions to reduce armed violence.

## Endnotes

- 1 United Nations General Assembly. 1995. *Supplement to the Agenda for Peace*. A/50/60-S/1995/1, paras. 60–61. 3 January.
- 2 Key contributions include Jeffrey Boutwell et al., *Lethal Commerce* (Cambridge, MA: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1995); Jasjit Singh, ed., *Light Weapons and International Security* (Delhi: Indian Pugwash Society and BASIC, 1995); Christopher Louise, *The Social Impacts of Light Weapons Availability and Proliferation*, Discussion Paper 59 (Geneva: UN Research Institute for Social Development with International Alert, 1995); the *Managing Arms in Peace Processes* series by UNIDIR’s Disarmament and Conflict Resolution project; and BASIC’s occasional papers.

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