

bulletin

Small Arms and Human Security

Reducing gun violence, improving security: National arms control efforts

Most gun deaths worldwide do not occur in war; rather, they result from civilians killing one another with individually owned guns.¹ This fact is not so surprising given that 60 per cent of the world's firearms are held by civilians—farmers, sporting shooters, criminal gangs, collectors, children and private security guards, among others.² While the number of war-related deaths has declined in recent years, the number of gun deaths in societies 'at peace' has not.³ Homicides, suicides and armed crime are often committed with firearms, making civilian gun possession a core human security issue for millions of people.

Typically, it is a nation's criminal justice system—including the police, courts, and correctional institutions—that is

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tasked with punishing the perpetrators of armed violence. But there is little evidence that severe sentencing alone deters further violence. From a prevention perspective, it is essential that action be taken to make armed violence less likely in the first place. One important factor is the extent to which a State can effectively regulate civilian possession of firearms. As early as 1997, the UN Economic and Social Council urged States to implement national arms control as a way to prevent crime and improve public health.⁴

In practice, States take a variety of approaches to gun regulation, but a number of common principles are easily discerned: most States prohibit guns among very young people or those who have been convicted of serious crimes; certain weapons are often prohibited, such as high-powered arms designed for military use or easily concealable guns; and most States criminalise the illegal possession of guns. Such basic policies are the backbone of efforts to keep guns out of the hands of those who are most likely to misuse them.

Recent State-level developments

In response to high levels of gun violence, or the persistent problem of large undocumented civilian stockpiles, at least a dozen States have tightened their laws in recent years. Following a mass shooting of young children, in

Coming up: Second Biennial Meeting of States on the UN Programme of Action

The second Biennial Meeting of States (BMS) to consider the implementation of the Programme of Action on small arms control will be held in New York from 11 to 15 July 2005. As in 2003, at the first BMS, States are encouraged to submit national progress reports, outlining implementation of the Programme of Action as well as challenges and lessons learned. These reports also provide a crucial opportunity for States to raise issues—such as private ownership and use of firearms—that were regrettably left out of the 2001 UN Programme of Action.

The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue will be releasing two publications at this meeting. The second and final phase of the survey of relief and development workers is drawing to a close, with over 2,000 questionnaires collected from some 90 countries. The views we gathered on the pervasiveness and impacts of weapons proliferation in areas of operation will be presented in a comprehensive report, which will build upon the report from the first phase of the project, entitled "In the Line of Fire".

The second publication is outlining some key themes around the proliferation and misuse of small arms. Themes will include assistance to survivors of gun violence and injury prevention; regulating gun possession by civilians and armed groups; taking weapons out of circulation; controlling supply; gender justice; understanding and reducing demand; security and justice sector reform; and human security indicators for assessing problems and progress. For each theme, there is an emphasis on identifying policy initiatives that show promise, lessons learned, and recommendations for the future.

For further information, see www.hdcentre.org (go to policy/small arms)

1997 the United Kingdom banned the ownership and possession of all handguns and greatly restricted the availability of rifles. In Australia, in response to another mass shooting of civilians, a comprehensive gun licensing and registration system was implemented in 1997. The government bought back 700,000 newly prohibited guns from civilians, cutting the civilian stockpile almost by half. From 1996 to 2001, the gun homicide rate dropped 65% for women and 54% for men.⁵

Brazil has taken bold steps recently, enacting the 'Disarmament Law' which prohibits the carrying of weapons in public and sets new standards for licensing owners of firearms. The law requires a national referendum, to take place in October 2005, on whether weapons sales to civilians should be banned entirely. This is the first such referendum on gun ownership in the world, and the first referendum ever held in Brazil.

States recovering from lengthy civil wars are also taking action. Cambodia and Sierra Leone are leading examples of nations where a large number of civilians were armed and where guns remained long after the fighting ended, facilitating further gun violence. Both governments have recognised that disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of former combatants must be followed by improved civilian gun control in order to diminish violence and restore respect for the rule of law.⁶

Options available

Global standards are clearly emerging.⁷ Licensing owners and registering guns are among the most basic measures available to States. The former requires prospective gun owners to apply and be screened for legal eligibility to keep guns. Among common requirements are proof of age, a criminal background check, demonstrated knowledge of gun laws and an agreement to follow safe handling and storage guidelines. Registration entails that the State keep records of every gun, each identified uniquely with its owner.

A number of other policies are important, such as prohibitions on re-selling guns, limits on the number of



▲ A man holds an inherited 1850s double-barrel shotgun that he is about to hand in at a police station in Pretoria, South Africa, on 31 March 2005. More than 30,000 weapons have been handed in to police under a three-month gun amnesty. © AP Photo/Leon Botha, Beeld

guns that civilians may own and restrictions on who and where guns may be carried.

Persistent large stockpiles of unregistered civilian weapons inhibit the potential of these laws, so it is essential that States also work to collect and destroy illicit stocks. The harder it becomes for law-breakers to obtain guns anonymously on the black market, the more effective these laws can be.

Global and regional policy development

But national level action alone is not sufficient. States that enact strict controls over civilian possession of guns find those controls undermined if firearms can be easily (illegally) imported from neighbours with less strict controls. Therefore, regional and even global harmonisation is required.

To date, global policymaking has lagged behind the norms developing at national. Early drafts of the 2001 UN Programme of Action (POA) explicitly called on States to regulate civilian possession and use of firearms in order to curb illicit gun trafficking.⁸ This text was eventually struck at the insistence of the United States and a small group of other States. Most States, however, appear to accept the connection: at the most recent UN meeting on implementation of the POA, 69 out of 103 governments (67%) highlighted their policies regarding civilian possession in their national reports.⁹

Regional policymaking has moved farther. Most notably, governments in Eastern and Southern Africa have agreed—through the Nairobi and SADC Protocols—to a comprehensive set of civilian gun laws that include the criminalisation of illicit possession of small arms and light weapons, the prohibition of automatic and semi-automatic rifles, gun owner licensing, gun registration, stringent marking requirements for all civilian guns and limits on the number of guns that can be owned. Importantly, both Protocols call for the harmonisation of laws within the region on a variety of measures, in recognition that each region shares common problems and that a strong, united approach is essential to bringing improvements.

Opposition voices

A minority of gun owners aligned with special interest groups predominantly based in the United States oppose the idea that controlling civilian access to guns can help reduce gun violence and increase security. Yet, the majority of gun owners have repeatedly signalled their support for civilian gun laws, including owner licensing and gun registration.¹⁰

This opposition is based on a belief that the more civilians own and carry guns, the safer society is—due to the presumed, but unproven, deterrent effect armed populations might have on criminals. However, this 'self defence/deterrence' model rejects the evidence base which links the presence of guns with increased death and injury. It also ignores the fact that gun violence is

Small arms meeting in Rio de Janeiro

The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, in collaboration with the Government of Brazil and the NGOs Sou da Paz and Viva Rio, convened an *International Meeting on the Regulation of Civilian Ownership and Use of Small Arms* in Rio de Janeiro during 16–18 March 2005. Participants identified the need to share good practices and lessons learnt by States and civil society to more effectively regulate civilian held small arms. It was consistently noted that this issue has transnational implications, given that weak control policies and enforcement in one State can affect its neighbours with serious consequences including illicit trafficking. More information on this meeting can be found at: www.hdcentre.org (go to Small arms/Putting People First/Rio meeting).

often committed between acquaintances (rather than between strangers) and by people who are not criminals before they kill, injure or coerce.¹¹

Another argument is that the primary threat to civilian security is State oppression, and, for this reason, allowing the government to manage who has guns and under what circumstances is dangerous. Yet there is little or no evidence that stringent gun laws are associated with State abuse of power. These concerns are however consistently reflected in regional and international small arms instruments, including the Nairobi Protocol, which notes the right to self-defence.¹² Moreover, in addition to a right to self-defence, all people have a human right to live in societies free from violence and the threat of violence. As such, “It is the State that must be responsible—and accountable—for ensuring public safety, rather than civilians themselves,” according to Barbara Frey, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Small Arms. Frey has provided a full explication of States’ obligations in this area.¹³

Looking ahead

There is growing international support for inclusion and strengthening of national arms control measures as part of global efforts to address the illicit trade in small arms in all its aspects. This momentum is borne largely of the realisation that a lack of effective national regulatory systems not only jeopardises the safety of that State’s citizens, but also—through trafficking—the citizens of other countries.

Whilst many nations have populations of gun owners and users, most recognise their responsibility—nationally, regionally and globally—to balance out the rights and the responsibilities of civilians possessing weapons.

It is important that whatever instrument follows the Programme of Action provide encouragement to States to make national arms control a part of their agenda for controlling the negative impacts of weapons availability and abuse. It is a human security imperative.

This article was written by Emile LeBrun, consultant, Lora Lumpe, Amnesty International USA, and Cate Buchanan, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.

Notes

¹ The Small Arms Survey estimates there are between 200,000–270,000 gun deaths annually in countries ‘at peace’. *Small Arms Survey 2004: Rights at Risk*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 175. A number of studies have reported reductions in the number of direct deaths occurring in armed conflict; recent estimates put the number around 50,000 per annum. See, for example, www.projectploughshares.org

² *Small Arms Survey 2002: Counting the Human Cost*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 79.

³ The 2004 edition of the Small Arms Survey confirmed annual non-conflict related gun death estimates cited as early as 2001. See *Human Security Report* (forthcoming 2005), Oxford University Press, New York, for recent estimates of conflict-related deaths.

⁴ Resolution 1997/28. Firearm regulation for purposes of crime prevention and public health and safety. UN Economic and Social Council. Available at: www.un.org/documents/ecosoc/res/1997/eres1997-28.htm

⁵ Mouzos, J and C Rushforth (2003), *Firearm Related Deaths in Australia, 1991–2001*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology; see also Duncan, Jamie, *Law Reforms Cut Gun Deaths*, *The Australian*, 27 October 2004

⁶ On Cambodia, see the EU Assistance on Curbing Small Arms in Cambodia at www.eu-asac.org/and_cambodia/cambodia_small_arms.html; on Sierra Leone, see www.undp.org/bcpr/smallarms/docs/proj_sierraleone.pdf

⁷ One exception to this trend is the United States, where national gun laws are comparatively very lax, and where lawmakers refuse to strengthen regulations, despite the highest levels of gun violence in the industrialized world. See: Krug, EG, KE Powell and LL Dahlberg (1998), “Firearm-related deaths in the United States and 35 other high- and upper-middle-income countries”, *International Journal of Epidemiology*, Vol 27, pp. 214–21.

⁸ United Nations, ‘Draft Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects’, version L4 Rev.1

⁹ UN Institute for Disarmament Research and the Small Arms Survey (2004), *Implementing the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons: Analysis of the Reports Submitted by States in 2003*. UN Publication, Geneva. UNIDIR/2004/25.

¹⁰ Polling in the US, for example, shows consistent support for a range of gun laws among gun owners. See Smith, T. 2001 National Gun Policy Survey of the National Opinion Research Center: Research Findings. University of Chicago. Available at: www.norc.uchicago.edu/online/gunso1.pdf

¹¹ Vetten, Lisa (2005), *Gunning for you: The role of guns in men’s killing of their intimate female partners*. CSVR Gender Programme, Policy Brief No. 02, April 2005. The peer-reviewed work of Dr. Arthur Kellermann in the United States has established that the presence of guns in the home raises the risks that family members will die by homicide or suicide. See for example: Kellermann AL, Rivera FP, Rushforth NB, et al. (1993). Gun ownership as a risk factor for homicide in the home. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 329: pp. 1084–91.

¹² Nairobi Protocol, Preamble.

¹³ Frey, Barbara M. (2002), ‘The Question of The Trade, Carrying And Use Of Small Arms And Light Weapons In The Context Of Human Rights And Humanitarian Norms’. Working Paper submitted by in accordance with Sub-Commission decisions 2001/120, para 46.

Tip of the Hat



... to the NGO Global Witness for helping document the case that led to the arrest on 18 March in the Netherlands of a Dutch businessman on charges of committing war crimes against Liberians and violating a United Nations arms embargo. Timber merchant Guus van Kouwenhoven, who is in custody, will be prosecuted by a Rotterdam court for allegedly helping set up militias in Liberia and supplying them with weapons through companies he operated in West Africa. Global Witness, a human rights organisation investigating rights violations related to the exploitation of natural resources, helped document evidence of van Kouwenhoven’s activities.

Check out www.globalwitness.org for more information.

New research: Perpetrators' use of guns is complex

This article discusses the results of new research on the variety of ways in which perpetrators of intimate partner violence use guns to intimidate and threaten. Studies such as this showcase the value of health research for guiding public policy on gun violence prevention. By throwing much-needed light on a taboo topic, this research offers a concrete example of how to investigate and act upon the gendered implications of gun violence—
Editor.

"He would take the gun out of his pocket and put it over there. It would be right in front of me. He didn't point it at me, but he just let me know it was there."

At some point during their lives, up to 69% of women around the world are physically or sexually abused by their current or former intimate partners.¹ In the USA guns play a significant role in intimate partner abuse and femicide. Women in the U.S. are 11 times more likely than women in other high-income countries to be victims.² Each year from 1980 to 2000, 60–70% of abusers who killed their partners used firearms to do so.³

Murder is not the only problem. Among survivors of intimate partner abuse, 4–5% report that their partners threatened them with a gun at least once.⁴ Being threatened with a firearm even once may result in on-going terror and stress. Although the long-term consequences of being threatened with a gun by an abusive partner have not been studied, a study of children exposed to violence between parents found that those who witnessed abuse involving guns and knives were at increased risk for conduct disorders, depression and anxiety.⁵ Interviews with abused women reveal that those who live with gun owners often feel as though they are under a constant lethal threat, which can increase their sense of helplessness and inhibit them from seeking help or leaving their relationships.⁶

Our recent study of 8,529 men enrolled in batterer intervention programmes in Massachusetts suggests that perpetrators use guns in a variety of ways, and that gun ownership by abusers increases the likelihood that victims will be threatened with firearms. Gun ownership may be an important risk factor for increased threat perpetration.

Information was compiled from men aged 18–65 who were mandated to attend programmes between 1999 and 2003. Participants were asked a series of questions about their relationship(s), history of abuse, and use of firearms. This information was then compiled anonymously by the state department of public health and made available for analysis.⁷

We found that 7% of the batterers reported that they had owned guns at some point during the three years prior to entering the intervention program, (the pro-

portion of adult men in the state population who report owning guns is 17%).⁸ Still, twelve per cent reported using a gun to threaten an intimate partner in at least one of four different ways: (1) Threatening a partner with a gun without displaying it; (2) Cleaning, loading or handling a firearm during an argument; (3) Threatening a pet or other thing the victim cares about without showing the gun; and (4) Shooting a gun during an argument. Abusers may use arms in a variety of other ways, such as sleeping with a firearm beneath their pillows or near the bed, amassing a gun collection, taking victims to firing ranges to watch them practice shooting, or carrying a firearm when they go out. Perpetrators with histories of substance abuse and homicide attempts were respectively 1.6 and 4.3 times more likely than other batterers to report having used guns to threaten their partners.

Several policy options emerge from this research. As we noted in the findings, "the federal law does not require police or court officers to find out if convicted batterers possess guns or to collect them. In fact, courts do not have the authority to disarm abusers unless state legislation specifically permits them to. As a result, in many jurisdictions it is left to the batterer to voluntarily relinquish firearms pursuant to conviction or the issuance of a protective order." Closing "loopholes" that enable some abusers to purchase firearms or remain owners of their guns despite restraining orders is critical. Additionally, the enforcement of existing laws needs to be strengthened, so that victims of abuse are consistently protected from gun violence.

Prior research suggests that legal interventions may make a difference. "One study of laws requiring retail gun vendors to screen potential buyers for restraining orders determined that intimate partner femicides were reduced by as much as 11% in states where these laws had been implemented."⁹

Finally, intervention programmes are a new and expanding area of violence prevention in the global community. As a result, those who work with violent men should be aware of the additional threat posed when abusers own guns, and should screen their clients for weapons ownership.

This article was written by Dr. Emily Rothman and Dr. David Hemenway of the Harvard Injury Control and Research Center in Boston, USA.

Notes

¹ See World Health Organisation (2002), World Report on Violence and Health, available on www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention

² Kellermann AL, Mercy JA. (1992), "Men, Women and Murder: Gender-Specific Differences in Rates of Fatal Violence and Victimization". *Journal of Trauma*. 31: pp. 1–5.

³ Fox J, Zawitz M. (2003), *Homicide trends in the United States*. U.S. Department of Justice: Bureau of Justice Statistics. Available at: www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs.

⁴ Tjaden P, Thoennes N. (2000), *Full Report of the Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey*. U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, DC. NCJ 183781.

⁵ Jouriles E, McDonald R, Norwood W, Ware HS, Spiller LC, Swank P. (1998), "Knives, guns, and interparent violence: Relations with child behavior problems". *Journal of Family Psychology*. 12(2): pp. 178–194.

⁶ Walker L. (1984), *The Battered Woman Syndrome*. Springer, New York.

⁷ Rothman EF, Hemenway D, Miller M, Azrael D. (2005), "Batterers' use of guns to threaten intimate partners". *JAMWA* 60:62–68. Available online at: www.jamwa.org/index.cfm?objectid=180A5A8C-D567-0B25-5C4965467A78B8AA

⁸ Centre for Disease Control, *Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey Data*. Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, GA

⁹ Vigdor E, Mercy J. (2003), "The impact of domestic violence firearms laws" In: Ludwig J, Cook P, eds. *Evaluating Gun Policy*. Brookings Institution Press, Washington, DC: pp. 157–214.

Weapons control in Sierra Leone

Weapon proliferation in the general population—not just among combatants—is a crucial issue to be considered by post-conflict planners. This article highlights the work in Sierra Leone to do just this—Editor.

Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programmes have come to be understood as a standard component of post-conflict packages. Such programmes predominantly target ex-combatants and should be viewed as a first step towards more comprehensive disarmament. The aim of DDR programmes is to re-establish civil authority by registering, demobilising, and breaking the networks between combatants. But their impact will be limited by issues of mandate, confidence, as well as new or unresolved issues and discontented individuals potentially further threatening the community. Opportunities can be seized to build on initial disarmament effort by involving civil (justice and law enforcement) authorities, as well as the communities themselves.

Sierra Leone provides some interesting lessons in this regard. Its brutal civil war lasted from 1991 to 2002. The UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) was established in October 1999 and embarked on a DDR programme targeting some 45,000 combatants. Following a rocky start, it is widely considered “one of the most successful exercises in disarmament and demobilisation ever conducted under the auspices of a complex UN peace operation.”¹ By the time of elections in May 2002, the country had been declared ‘disarmed’.

Second phase: national security institutions

The DDR programme did not attempt to bring civilian-held firearms under control. In order to boost confidence in the legitimacy and effectiveness of the new national government, a second disarmament campaign was conducted by national security institutions to recover weapons held by civilians prior to presidential elections in May 2004. This initiative failed to make great progress, and revealed the constraints still faced by the police in terms of logistical capacity and lack of trust of the population. However, it did provide an opportunity for reviewing the legislation pertaining to firearms acquisition and use, as well as national regulations on import and export of small arms. Indeed, the Arms and Ammunitions Act no. 14 (1955) is an outdated relic from the country’s colonial era.² Sierra Leone’s licensing procedure was highly centralised and protracted, leaving much room for evasion, with outdated penalties not serving as a serious deterrent. A legislative proposal was therefore drafted and submitted to Cabinet for approval in September 2004.

Third phase: the Arms for Development programme

In 2003 the Government of Sierra Leone and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched an ‘Arms for Development’ (afd) programme, seeking to encourage the voluntary surrender of weapons. In UNDP’s

view, comprehensive disarmament had to follow DDR in order to consolidate it.

A procedure was developed to ensure community ownership and active participation. Project Management Committees were created in various chiefdoms—the administrative boundary below the district level (Sierra Leone comprises 12 districts and 149 chiefdoms.) Committee members were selected following consultations with youth, women, elders and community leaders. The Committees are responsible for implementation of activities, including the establishment of ‘dropping centres’, where gun owners can surrender their weapons. The weapons are registered and a receipt is provided. At a future date the owner may request a firearms licence and possibly reclaim the collected weapons after issuance of a licence.³ Weapons surrendered to dropping centres are regularly collected by the Sierra Leone police and stored at a secure site within the compound of the district police headquarters.

Once all the weapons in a given chiefdom have been surrendered, the police undertake a verification exercise with monitoring from UNDP and the consent of the local community and authorities. Verification consists of a random search of houses in 30% of the villages. If no weapons are found, an arms-free certificate is awarded to the chiefdom. This certificate entitles the chiefdom to a grant for community development projects selected following a procedure that ensures representation of all groups. Examples of funded projects include a mini-stadium/town field, a market centre, two primary schools and a health post.

Accomplishments and challenges

In 2004 the afd programme involved a total of 14 chiefdoms. Fifty more are being targeted in 2005. It is too soon to gauge the impact of this programme; however, no firearms-related incident has yet originated from any chiefdom participating in the programme, and no certified chiefdom has lost its arms-free status.⁴ In addition, a National Committee on Small Arms was established in December 2004. This body has been tasked with the development of the first ever Plan of Action on Small Arms by July 2005.

The phasing out of UNAMSIL poses a great challenge: What was once the biggest peace-keeping force in the history of the United Nations has now been reduced to less than 3,000 men, with final drawdown slated for July 2005. The public is not entirely confident that national security institutions are ready to take over from the UN. Also, while the afd seems to work well in rural areas, a different strategy needs to be designed for Freetown and surrounding urban areas. This issue is a priority, due to high levels of firearm-related crime in these areas.

This article was written by Daniel Ladouceur, Project Coordinator, UNDP Sierra Leone.

Notes

¹ Thus, Thokozani and Sarah Meek (2003), *Sierra Leone—Building the Road to Recovery*, Institute for Security Studies Monograph No. 80, p. 10

² Government of Sierra Leone and UNDP (2005), *Arms for Development: Draft Annual Report 2004*, unpublished

³ The issuance of licenses to weapons owners requires the adoption of legislation by the government described below.

⁴ Government of Sierra Leone and UNDP (2005), *Arms for Development: Draft Annual Report 2004*, unpublished

■ In Their Own Words

Which is more important—an individual's right to carry a gun for self-defence or a community's right to restrict gun ownership to promote better safety for all?

Jaco Bothma

Director of the Central Firearms Register,
South Africa Police Service

The restriction of firearm ownership is entrenched within the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and embedded within the new Firearms Control Act. Both note that fundamental rights and freedom are related to the rights of others and by the needs of society. It is generally recognised that the public safety, health, order and democratic values justify the imposition of limitations on gun possession and use.

The restriction of firearm ownership by a Government falls within the ambit of reasonable duty and is justified in an open and democratic society based on respect for equality and human dignity. The benefits contained within public safety *versus* private firearm ownership weigh much more heavily in the overall public domain and therefore necessitate the restriction of firearms. The right of a Government to restrict gun ownership is therefore in the interest of the community to attain better safety and it overrides an individual's right to possess a firearm for self-defence.

Ambassador Luis Alfonso de Alba

Mexican Representative to the Conference on
Disarmament in Geneva

There is an urgent need to develop clear and strict guidelines to restrict civilian gun possession. It is increasingly evident that the right for self-defence is being abused in many settings. Communities pay a high price for this lack of regulation as they experience violence on a day to day basis. Possession of arms by civilians should only be allowed with strict standards and procedures for leisure purposes and in extreme cases, when a real threat exists, for personal security. They should not be allowed to counter alleged threats, as this would only increase the risks of more violence".

Frank Leutenegger

Swissguns, www.swissguns.ch

The issue doesn't arise ... or should not arise. If a government was truly in a position to promote security, it would have a duty to intervene. This is unfortunately *never* the case. The problem lies in the total impotence of governments in this matter. The United Kingdom, so strict on legal possession of guns, is confronted with uncontrollable urban violence, aggravated by an influx of illicit weapons. In Switzerland, on the other hand, where

weapons cannot even be properly counted (estimates vary from 1.5 to 5.5 million), violence remains – for now – at “folkloric” levels. Even in countries torn apart by civil war, disarmament, standing no chance of being total, is not the solution. Aggressors are always armed, victims always unarmed.

Rebecca Peters

Director, International Action Network on Small Arms
Most of the world's guns are in civilian hands, so the global effort to reduce small arms proliferation and misuse must include regulation of civilian possession. Controlling the importation, sale and ownership of guns is the most immediate step that most countries can take to reduce gun violence, which is why the majority of IANSA's 600 members groups are working to strengthen their national gun laws. Responding to the devastation caused by weapons flowing undetected and uncontrolled into so many communities, governments are increasingly recognising the need for comprehensive, consistent policies to close the loopholes and stem the lethal flood.

Nana F. Busia

Coordinator, Small Arms Reduction & Conflict
Prevention Project, Ghana

An overall human security imperative dictates the primacy of a community's right to restrict private gun ownership through effective regulations. The relationship between perceptions of security and the levels of gun ownership by individuals is worth exploring. Perceptions of instability may well bring about increased acquisition of guns for self protection, but indiscriminate ownership of guns renders societies vulnerable to armed violence and only further heightens the sense of insecurity and instability. It is thus incumbent on responsible communities to raise awareness of the negative impacts of gun proliferation as a prerequisite to effective restrictive measures. Regulating gun ownership is necessary to curtail the cycle of insecurity and weapon proliferation.

Mary Leigh Blek

President Emeritus, Million Mom March

Neither. If there's an individual “right” to private gun ownership, and that is debatable, society must ensure that this “right” carries owner accountability and responsibility and that means background checks, licensing and registration among other requirements. Guns carry grave risks. Having lost our young adult son, Matthew, to a teen-age robber wielding a junk handgun, I feel very strongly that communities must exercise their “right” to keep guns out of the wrong hands. Who is responsible for Matthew's death? We all share blame because we failed to provide a safer environment through proper gun regulation.

Jewish settlers urged to give up weapons

Jewish settlers should hand over their weapons before the planned Gaza withdrawal to prevent any chance of bloody confrontations with Israeli troops over the dismantling of settlements, a settler leader said. The proposal by ultranationalist lawmaker Effie Eitam marked the first time a settler leader acknowledged the potential for violence among settlers. Many Jewish settlers in Gaza and the West Bank are armed, and settler leaders have warned that extremists could be planning to fire on authorities during the withdrawal. Dozens of people also answered the call of peace movements and demonstrated in Jerusalem on 7 March under the slogan "Take away the settlers' guns" and "No surrender to settler terror!". The demonstration marked the start of a popular campaign to disarm Jewish settlers.

Source: Indymedia, 7 Mar 2005 and AP, 30 Mar 2005

NRA leader advocates guns for teachers

All options should be considered to prevent rampages such as the 21 March Minnesota school shooting that took 10 lives – including making guns available to teachers, says a top National Rifle Association leader. "I'm not saying that that means every teacher should have a gun or not, but what I am saying is we need to look at all the options at what will truly protect the students," the NRA's first vice president, Sandra S. Froman, told The Associated Press.

Source: AP, 25 Mar 2005

Disarmament deadline approaches in Congo

Militia fighters in the lawless eastern province of Ituri, DRC, had until Friday 1 April to give up their weapons voluntarily, after which UN peacekeepers vowed to force them to disarm. The brigade commander of 5,000 peacekeepers in Bunia, the provincial capital, expects many to defy the deadline and resist disarmament. If that happens, he has said, his troops – assisted by more than 3,000 Congolese soldiers – will overrun them with sheer firepower. The recent tough talk from UN peacekeepers comes after years of being accused of failing to stop eastern Congo's myriad atrocities. The deadline applies to about 9,000 adults in seven militias. Another 6,000 child soldiers will be allowed to voluntarily surrender their guns after 1 April. The disarmament is part of a larger power-sharing agreement to integrate the armed groups into the national army, but the Bunia peacekeepers were initially hamstrung by a weak Security Council mandate allowing them only to protect UN staff.

Source: AP, 31 Mar 2005

India seeking a global ban on small-arms sales to non-state actors

New Delhi is in the process of drafting a proposal to the United Nations seeking a global ban on small-arms sales to non-state actors. The proposal is being developed jointly by the Indian Home Ministry and External Affairs Ministry. Whether India is successful in this initiative

depends on how it conveys its concerns to the European nations, Israel and, particularly, the United States.

Source: Asia Times, 25 Feb 2005

Afghanistan: Too many weapons in private hands

According to Afghanistan's New Beginning Programme (ANBP), the UN disarmament and weapons collection programme, more than 40,000 of an estimated 60,000 members of Afghan militia forces have been disarmed since the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) process started in late 2003. But huge amounts of ammunition and guns remain with local commanders and large militia forces and at ex-military bases and private stockpiles throughout Afghanistan. The existence of such quantities of ammunition and weapons in the hands of non-state actors means the danger of further conflict remains real. The UN has launched a survey to identify the locations of weapons stockpiles. Canada is the lead donor to the project, and so far has contributed some USD 400,000 to conduct the survey. The whole programme, which is expected to take more than a year, will require much extra funding.

Source: IRIN News, 7 Mar 2005

Somalia : UN Security Council recommends Sanctions Committee visit

The UN Security Council has recommended that its Sanctions Committee visits Somalia to reinforce the Council's commitment to fully enforce the arms embargo against the war-ravaged Horn of Africa country. The Council also said more focus should be put on criminalising illegal financial activities, through which many arms embargo-violators got the funds for their activities. The recommendations followed a report by the UN-appointed monitoring group which said weapons had continued to enter Somalia despite the ban, a trend, they said, that could undermine efforts to install a new government in the country. The report uncovered "34 individual arms shipments or violations of the arms embargo from February 2004 to the time of writing the present report", that is, February 2005. The monitoring group also supplied the Council with a confidential report containing the names of people responsible for the illicit arms trade.

Source: UN News Service, 14 Mar 2005, and IRIN News, 16 Mar 2005

Belgium suspends export licence to Tanzania

The Belgian government has suspended on March 24 the export of equipment to a munitions factory in Tanzania pending investigations and an irrevocable assurance that the bullets manufactured by the Mzingo plant in Morogoro will not end up in the war-torn Great Lakes region. The export licence was granted in February by the Walloon regional government against the wishes of the Belgian federal government.

Source: The East African, 4 April 2005

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