



Press Release

EMBARGOED UNTIL
15:00 GENEVA TIME
ON 28 AUGUST 2007

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RAPID URBANIZATION CONTRIBUTES TO INCREASED FIREARM VIOLENCE—NEW REPORT Consequences of urbanization especially dramatic in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America

Large-scale and uncontrolled urbanization is often accompanied by decreasing levels of public safety and appears to be associated with increased rates of armed violence, finds the 2007 edition of the *Small Arms Survey*. The drug trade, the availability of weapons, opportunities for criminal gain, and the social dislocation and anonymity of large cities all contribute to armed violence. A dearth of employment opportunities and resources in some cities is a factor in the onset of urban conflicts, from Brazil and Guatemala to South Africa and India.

‘Cities are now home to the majority of the world’s population and present particular challenges for tackling armed violence,’ said Keith Krause, Programme Director of the Geneva-based Small Arms Survey. ‘Whereas urbanization used to be associated with industrialization and economic growth, this link has been broken. Today’s urban sprawl sees 25 million people each year join the one billion people who are living in slums—often sites of violence and coercion—while the wealthy retreat to gated communities,’ said Krause.

The *Small Arms Survey 2007: Guns and the City* studies the violence associated with urbanization in a number of settings. Brazil’s firearm homicide rate surpasses that of some countries at war, with a firearm death rate that grew threefold from 7 to 21 deaths per 100,000 in the period 1982–2002. In Brazil, firearm homicide is correlated to urbanization and social inequality. Furthermore, men are 17 times more likely to be victimized by firearm violence in urban areas than women, though that difference diminishes in rural areas. At greatest risk are young, unemployed school dropouts.

In post-conflict settings such as Burundi, urban insecurity is also a problem. Since the 2003 ceasefire in Burundi, the security situation in the country has improved markedly, but this progress has been weak in the capital, Bujumbura, where 16 per cent of household survey respondents stated that many or most households owned guns and where many people are acquiring small arms such as handguns for self-protection.

The findings point to a need to enhance efforts to improve security in urban settings. Responses to urban armed violence must take account of the fact that urban violence is heterogeneous and influenced by multiple risk factors. Successful municipal interventions have tended to combine coercive measures, such as forcible disarmament and intelligence-led activities, with compliance-oriented and voluntary approaches including decentralized and community-centred policing, temporary amnesties, and educational and awareness-building initiatives.

This edition of the *Survey* also reveals that:

- Civilians own approximately 650 million of the total 875 million combined civilian, law enforcement, and military firearms in the world today. US citizens alone own some 270 million of these, which translates into roughly 90 firearms for every 100 people.
- Every year, 530,000 to 580,000 military rifles, assault rifles, and carbines are produced under licence or as unlicensed copies, representing 60 to 80 per cent of total annual production. Only 57 per cent of weapons produced by technology acquirers are produced under licence.
- At least 60 states made what could reasonably be interpreted as irresponsible small arms shipments to 36 countries during the period 2002–04.
- Cheaper weapons prices are associated with an increased risk of civil war.
- The more effective a country’s regulatory laws are, the higher weapons prices will be. In African countries, the price of an assault rifle is around USD 200 lower than the global average, highlighting the ease with which arms cross porous borders.
- More than two years after the formal end of the second North–South civil war in Sudan, many southerners feel that security has deteriorated, and demand for weapons remains strong. In Lakes State, South Sudan, for example, 35 per cent of household survey respondents admitted that they or someone in their compound possessed a firearm.
- In Karamoja, Uganda, and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, there is evidence that security forces’ ammunition is falling into the hands of armed warriors and criminal gangs, respectively.

Published by Cambridge University Press, the *Small Arms Survey 2007: Guns and the City* is the seventh annual global analysis of small arms-related issues. An independent research project funded by numerous governments, the Small Arms Survey is the principal source of public information and analysis on all aspects of small arms and armed violence. 📄

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