

In the Line of Fire

Surveying the Perceptions of Humanitarian and Development Personnel of the Impacts of Small Arms and Light Weapons

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A Joint Initiative of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and the Small Arms Survey

In the Line of Fire: Surveying the Perceptions of Humanitarian and Development Personnel of the Impacts of Small Arms and Light Weapons reports the findings of the first phase of a multi-year and multi-agency initiative to appraise the impacts of small arms availability and misuse on a particular segment of the civilian community—humanitarian and development personnel.

While an array of UN Secretary-General reports and anecdotal studies have highlighted the dangers of armed violence to humanitarian and development personnel, there remains a deficiency of evidence-based analysis to prove what is already intuitively known: that aid workers are frequently targeted and exposed to a high risk of death and injury in the course of their work.

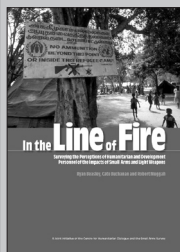
The Security and Risk in Humanitarian and Development Action Study involved a survey distributed in seven languages, in 39 countries and two territories, and the participation of 10 humanitarian and development agencies. The preliminary findings, reported in *In the Line of Fire*, fill an important knowledge gap by drawing on a representative distribution

of countries and agencies, and employing robust survey instruments and statistical analysis. The report captures the perceptions of and attitudes toward small arms availability and misuse of over 600 respondents working in a variety of security environments and privileges the views of those working at the local level. But it is only a preliminary step to the further study that is needed.

Summary of selected findings

- **Respondents reported working in a variety of security environments:** from “little” or “no” violence to “widespread armed conflict”. A strong factor related to individuals’ assessments of their security environment is the estimated level of small arms availability and misuse.
- **Regardless of the security context, humanitarian and development workers reported a large number of groups to be in possession of weapons.** Beyond the military, police, and private security forces, a majority of respondents reported many other groups to be armed, including organised criminal groups, insurgent groups, and civilians. A sizable percentage of respondents estimate “moderate” to “very high” levels of civilian possession of small arms.
- **Operations are adversely affected by the availability and use of small arms.** Frequent obstacles—such as evacuations, suspensions or delays, and inaccessible beneficiaries—are associated with violent security environments and with higher estimates of small arms prevalence and misuse. Nearly three quarters of personnel working in areas with “very high” levels of small arms availability reported recent suspensions or delays in operations.
- **Civilians are frequently the victims of small arms use.** Targeting of civilians, unintentional death and injury, and frequent use of small arms for criminal or coercive purposes were all noted. Overall, the highest proportion of weapons-related death and injury among civilians were attributed to handguns. In areas characterised by widespread conflict or war, assault rifles surpassed handguns as the leading cause of weapons-related death and injury among civilians. Respondents also appear to routinely encounter a variety of small arms—mostly handguns and assault rifles—in and around “programme” areas.

A snapshot of the study



Study Participants The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and the Small Arms Survey, in collaboration with CARE, Oxfam GB, Médecins du Monde, Concern Worldwide, World Vision, UNDP, Handicap International, Merlin, Save the Children Federation and local partner NGOs.

Methodology 602 questionnaires from 10 organisations (including local partner organisations), in 39 countries and two territories.

Coverage Global survey with a particular focus on Cambodia, Thailand, and the Philippines in Southeast Asia. In the Balkans, particular focus on Albania, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, and Kosovo.

When Questionnaires were distributed between April and June 2002, and collected between August and November 2002.

How Available in electronic and paper version, and in Spanish, French, English, Serbian, Albanian, Khmer and Portuguese.

- **Many staff feel personally threatened by small arms.** Perceptions of personal threat are heightened not only in areas characterised by higher levels of violence or conflict, but also in areas where civilian possession of small arms is seen to be more prevalent. In addition to perceptions of personal threat, a large number of respondents report that they or their colleagues have experienced serious security incidents, including armed intimidation, armed robbery, armed assault, detention and kidnapping. Many respondents report colleagues having suffered either non-fatal or fatal small arms-related injuries.
- **Despite working in dangerous environments, many personnel indicated that they have not received any security training** within the organisation for which they currently work. The frequency of reported security training does not always correspond to the level of violence in a given environment, to the estimated prevalence and misuse of small arms, or to the level of personal threat expressed by respondents. Potentially more disconcerting, national staff are half as likely as expatriate staff to receive security training in many organisations.
- **Those that have received security training, however, typically viewed the training or awareness as being “helpful” in dealing with the availability and misuse of small arms.** Security training or awareness is also associated with an increased tendency for individuals to take security precautions, such as walking with others or limiting local travel. The vast majority of respondents were unfamiliar with basic safety procedures associated with guns and ammunition, such as applying safety locks or the safe storage of weapons. Those who received security training, however, were no more knowledgeable about small arms safety than those who had not undertaken security training.
- **The study’s two focus regions—the Balkans and Southeast Asia—revealed important differences with regard to the impacts of small arms availability and use** on operations, personnel, and civilians. In general, compared to respondents from the Balkans, respondents from Southeast Asia tend to report working in more violent or conflict-prone environments and to estimate more prevalence and misuse of small arms.
- **Respondents from both regions frequently reported seeing handguns, but Southeast Asia respondents were much more likely than Balkans respondents to report having seen assault rifles.** Southeast Asia respondents were more likely than Balkans respondents to indicate assault rifles as the leading cause of death and injury among civilians, to note the targeting of civilians with assault rifles, and to indicate awareness of unintentional death or injury of civilians due to assault rifles. There were no significant differences between the two regions in terms of reported use of arms against civilians for criminal or coercive purposes.
- **In general, Southeast Asia respondents more frequently reported operational hindrances than did Balkans respondents.** Moreover, they rated armed attacks on relief workers and armed conflict between belligerents as more significant hindrances to operational effectiveness than did Balkans respondents. Despite these trends, respondents from Southeast Asia expressed less negative attitudes toward small

arms than did respondents from the Balkans, potentially indicating a complex relationship among security environments, region, and small arms availability and misuse.

About the organisations

The **Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue** is an independent and impartial organisation, based in Geneva, Switzerland, dedicated to dialogue on humanitarian issues, the resolution of violent conflict and the alleviation of its impacts on people. The Centre facilitates high-level, low-key dialogue amongst principal actors to armed conflict as well as other stakeholders such as NGOs and UN agencies. This work is complemented by research and policy efforts to advance action on contemporary humanitarian challenges such as the nature of non-state armed groups, mediation techniques, war economies, the rule of law and arms availability. In 2001 the Centre established the Human Security and Small Arms Programme, which undertakes a variety of projects aimed at furthering understanding about the human cost of weapons availability and misuse, as well as advocating options for action.

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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 contributions from the Governments of Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom. It collaborates with the United Nations, international organisations, and with various research institutes and non-governmental organisations in many countries including Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Georgia, Germany, Israel, Kenya, Norway, Palestine, the Russian Federation, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, the United Kingdom and the United States.

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