

ARMED AND AIMLESS



# INTRODUCTION

*By Eric G. Berman and Nicolas Florquin*

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its 15 members<sup>1</sup> have long understood the destabilizing and deleterious effects of small arms and light weapons<sup>2</sup> on the region. Their decisions to undertake six regional peace-keeping operations since 1990 acknowledge these challenges and underscore their resolve to confront them.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the members, working unilaterally and together, have been at the forefront of international efforts to combat this scourge. A noteworthy example is the ground-breaking initiative of the Government of Mali to enter into a meaningful dialogue with members of its Tuareg and Arab minorities, resulting in the voluntary disarmament of 3,000 combatants in 1996 (Poulton and ag Youssouf, 1998). The 1998 ECOWAS *Moratorium on Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Light Weapons in West Africa* represented an important step towards addressing small arms proliferation in the region.<sup>4</sup> Recent notable developments include plans to transform the moratorium into a legally binding instrument, the decision to terminate the Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development (PCASED) and replace it with the ECOWAS Small Arms Control Programme (ECOSAP), and the creation of a Small Arms Unit (SAU) at ECOWAS headquarters.<sup>5</sup>

The Small Arms Survey, responding to an initiative launched by the Foreign Ministry of Mali as chair of the Human Security Network (HSN), and with the support of the Governments of Canada, Norway, and Switzerland,<sup>6</sup> agreed to undertake a study of armed groups and small arms in the ECOWAS region. ‘Armed groups’ in this report are groups equipped with small arms that have the capacity to challenge the state’s monopoly of legitimate force.<sup>7</sup> It was believed that a study that focused solely on armed groups in opposition to the state would be of limited utility, for three principal reasons. First, history shows that governments in the region change frequently and often violently. Indeed, every country in ECOWAS has experienced a military coup d’état except two: Cape Verde and Senegal. Thus, an armed group formed ostensibly to protect the state may soon find itself in opposition to it as a result of changing circumstances. Second, groups’ allegiances may shift regardless of what happens in the capital. Third, a group might support the state politically and still challenge its monopoly on coercion. The study, however, does not cover small-scale banditry and low-level criminal

activity, nor does it document private security companies that are becoming more numerous but in West Africa are understood not to be equipped with firearms.

The research project was to consist of two phases. During Phase 1, the Small Arms Survey conducted desk research to investigate and document the scope of the problem. The Survey relied primarily on open-source information, including UN reports, media accounts, and studies by reputable NGOs and research institutes.

The Survey supplemented this research with field interviews of government officials, humanitarian aid workers, and members of civil society organizations active in promoting peace. During Phase 1 ten ECOWAS countries were visited. Eric Berman, then a consultant with the Survey and now its Managing Director, conducted interviews in Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone from 22 February to 6 March 2004. Nicolas Florquin, a Small Arms Survey researcher, visited Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal during 3–20 March. And Mahamadou Nimaga, Foreign Affairs Adviser with the Malian Foreign Ministry who was based in Bamako and selected to work with the Survey, travelled to Benin, Burkina Faso, and Niger during 1–21 March.

A preliminary report was presented in May 2004 at the Sixth Ministerial Meeting of the Human Security Network in Bamako. It provided information on armed groups in nine ECOWAS countries. The draft also included some initial observations and recommendations, but the focus was on taking the first steps to map the situation on the ground, starting a dialogue, and preparing for Phase 2. The final report was to be launched at the HSN's Seventh Ministerial Meeting in Ottawa in May 2005.

Phase 2 concentrated on directed research in the region. Towards this end, the Survey commissioned field studies along the lines outlined in its preliminary mapping report. Local institutions, researchers, and independent consultants undertook research between June and December 2004. The Survey carried out two additional field visits to monitor research on the ground. Nicolas Florquin travelled with other Survey staff to Bamako from 30 August to 3 September to train researchers from the three members of the Mano River Union (Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone)<sup>s</sup> working on children associated with fighting forces (CAFF). While in Mali, they also held intensive focus group discussions with Malian ex-combatants. During 2–5 September, Eric Berman went to Nigeria to participate in focus group discussions that the Survey's local partner organized in Jos and Port Harcourt.

The Survey kept ECOWAS informed of the project from the outset. Eric Berman first visited ECOWAS Headquarters in March 2004, when he briefed

General Cheikh Oumar Diarra, Deputy Executive Secretary for Political Affairs, Defence, and Security, and other senior officials on the planned study. He met with Dr Mohamed Ibn Chambas, the Executive Secretary, on a subsequent visit in June. ECOWAS welcomed the initiative and pledged its support.

## Part I

This monograph comprises two main parts. Part I presents the results of field research carried out during Phase 2. It contains six in-depth studies that are presented as independent thematic chapters. These were selected based on the importance of the issues explored. Additional factors included logistical constraints, security concerns, and the availability of local researchers.

The first two chapters highlight the wide variety of armed groups that continue to threaten the region, using Nigeria and Mali as case studies. The first chapter investigates armed groups in Rivers and Plateau states in Nigeria. Armed violence involving various types of groups has reached dramatic levels in that country, which is the continent's most populous, with more citizens than the other 14 ECOWAS member states combined. In 2004 President Olusegun Obasanjo declared a state of emergency in Plateau state, suspending the state governor for six months, and negotiated directly with armed groups in Rivers state. Mali's experience dealing with very disparate armed groups since 1990 is addressed in Chapter 2. Such groups include insurgents and self-defence militias involved in the 1990–96 Tuareg and Arab rebellion, as well as a north African terrorist movement that has infiltrated the north of the country in recent years.

Chapters 3 and 4 examine some of the challenges linked to armed groups' armament, looking more specifically at craft firearm production and the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants. Craft small arms production is a region-wide phenomenon<sup>9</sup> raising fears that it might become a source of weapons for armed groups. Chapter 3 examines this underground activity in Ghana, a country that hosts particularly organized and technologically advanced gunsmiths. DDR programmes are among the key initiatives currently put forward to recover illicit arms from armed groups and promote regional stability. The most recent programme in Liberia, which started in December 2003, is reviewed in Chapter 4.

The two final chapters document some of the human security implications of armed groups and small arms in the region. Chapter 5 presents the results of an

independent study commissioned by the Small Arms Survey and the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) on the militarization and demilitarization of Guinea's refugee camps.<sup>10</sup> It documents how Guinea's large refugee population was targeted during fighting on its southern border in 2000–01, and how various armed groups infiltrated the country's refugee camps. The complex linkages between small arms availability and children associated with fighting forces are examined in Chapter 6. The analysis is based on more than 250 interviews with CAFF carried in the Mano River Union states of Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.

## Part II

Part II of the study consists of a region-wide mapping of armed groups. It updates and expands the preliminary (Phase 1) report to cover all 15 current ECOWAS member countries. It includes groups that have been active at any given time since 1998, when the ECOWAS Moratorium was adopted.

The Survey created a template to document each case. The format is designed to clearly and concisely present the information gathered. It can be easily updated. This structure provides the basis for a fuller and more detailed account of armed groups in ECOWAS as well as in other regions.

Each study is organized into three sections. The first identifies the armed groups recently active in the country in question. The second reviews the small arms and light weapons believed to be in their possession. The third notes the effects of these groups' activities on human security.<sup>11</sup>

The first section on *Armed groups* lists each group separately. Every entry is divided into five subsections: (1) *Origins/composition*; (2) *Leadership*; (3) *Areas of control/activity*; (4) *Sources of financing/support*; and (5) *Status*. The headings are largely self-explanatory. *Origins/composition* notes the organization's establishment as well as its size and structure. Any information on recruitment, such as salaries paid, is included here. The group's political and military command (where separate) are discussed in *Leadership*, with emphasis placed on the present. *Areas of control/activity* documents each group's geographical base and its recent operations. The financial and natural resources available to an organization to allow it to operate, as well as political backing (both foreign and domestic), are highlighted under the heading *Financing/support*. The last subsection describes the *Status* of the organization as of 31 December 2004.

The second section on *Small arms and light weapons* has three categories: (1) *Stockpiles*; (2) *Sources*; and (3) *Recovered*. The *Stockpiles* subsection records weapons in the inventories of the various armed groups discussed above. The *Sources* subsection notes how these groups received their weapons and focuses on domestic and foreign sources of supply. The subsection on arms *Recovered* looks at DDR processes. DDR in this study refers to politically negotiated processes that have a weapons collection component and aim at ensuring the transition of combatants into civilian life. Other initiatives designed to reclaim weapons from these groups, including ‘weapons for development’ projects, gun buy-backs, amnesties, and seizures by security forces, are also noted.

The third section on *Human security issues* has three categories: (1) *CAFF*; (2) *Displacement*; and (3) *Other violations or abuses*. The first subsection on *CAFF* considers whether armed groups conscript, enlist, or use children to participate actively in hostilities.<sup>12</sup> It provides information on the extent of recruitment and, when available, the practical functions children served within the armed groups. The second subsection highlights the extent of *Displacement*.<sup>13</sup> It provides information on internally displaced persons (IDPs) and country nationals registered as refugees abroad. Where applicable and available, figures reflect the situation both at the peak of conflict and as last reported by specialized agencies or NGOs. In addition, it indicates the number of foreign refugees hosted by the country under study as last reported. The final subsection documents the involvement of armed groups in *Other violations or abuses* that fall under the definition of crimes against humanity or war crimes,<sup>14</sup> with a particular emphasis on killings, rape, and torture.

The media and NGOs have reported effectively on the crises in West Africa. The people of the region have suffered greatly from a succession of lengthy and brutal civil wars whose effects are felt far beyond the countries in conflict. Pictures of young children under arms and stories of terrible human rights abuses are seared into our collective conscience. ECOWAS, the international community, and civil society are working hard to address the challenges that armed groups present to the promotion of human security. Much progress has been made and tremendous resources—both human and financial—have been expended. As this book documents, however, the situation can be expected to deteriorate if current efforts are considered sufficient.

## List of abbreviations

BICC	Bonn International Center for Conversion
CAFF	Children associated with fighting forces
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration
ECOSAP	ECOWAS Small Arms Control Programme
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
HSN	Human Security Network
IDP	Internally displaced person
MRU	Mano River Union
PCASED	Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development
SAU	Small Arms Unit

## Endnotes

- 1 ECOWAS, established in 1975, originally had 15 members: Benin (then known as Dahomey), Burkina Faso (then known as Upper Volta), Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. Cape Verde joined ECOWAS in 1977 and Mauritania left the organization in 2000.
- 2 The Small Arms Survey uses the term 'small arms and light weapons' broadly to cover small arms intended for both civilian and military use, as well as light weapons intended for military use. When possible, it follows the definition used in the United Nations Report of the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms (UNGA, 1997):
  - Small arms: revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, sub-machine guns, assault rifles, and light machine guns.
  - Light weapons: heavy machine guns, hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns, recoilless rifles, portable launchers of anti-tank missile and rocket systems, portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems, and mortars of calibres of less than 100 mm.

The Survey uses the term 'firearm' to mean civilian and military hand-held weapons that expel a projectile from a barrel by the action of an explosive. Unless the context dictates otherwise, the Survey uses the term 'small arms' to refer to both small arms and light weapons, whereas the term 'light weapons' refers specifically to this category of weapons.

- 3 One peace operation, the ECOWAS mission for the Guinea-Liberian border (authorized in 2000), never deployed. The five others included Liberia (1990–99), Sierra Leone (1997–2000), Guinea-Bissau (1998–99), Côte d’Ivoire (2002–04), and Liberia again (2003). See Berman and Sams (2003).
- 4 For an overview of the ECOWAS moratorium and other small arms control initiatives in the region, see Ebo (2003).
- 5 In December 2004 the role of ECOSAP and its relationship to the SAU were still being worked out. Getting this relationship right and ensuring that civil society and national commissions are appropriately engaged will largely determine whether these developments are successful.
- 6 More specifically, support came through the Human Security Programme of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (Canada), the Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Norway), and the Département Fédéral des Affaires Etrangères (Switzerland).
- 7 For a detailed discussion of the rationale behind this definition, see Policzer (2004).
- 8 The Mano River Union (MRU) was established in 1973 with the objective of subregional economic integration. The Union sought to create a customs union among its members. MRU member states have witnessed some of the most violent conflicts in the region since the early 1990s. As a result, most of its activities in recent years have focused on security matters.
- 9 As opposed to legal or state production, which in 2002 was limited to Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Nigeria. See Small Arms Survey (2003). The Guinean plant that produced 12 and 16 gauge shotgun ammunition is located in Boké. It was shut down in July 2004 for renovation, but is scheduled to reopen in April 2005. Written correspondence with Cissé Mahmoud, National Secretary of the Guinean National Commission on Small Arms, 17 March 2005.
- 10 The Small Arms Survey-BICC study on refugee camp militarization will be published during the second half of 2005. In addition to Guinea, it will comprise case studies of Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda.
- 11 The HSN (1999) defines human security as ‘freedom from pervasive threats to people’s rights, their safety or even their lives’. It further notes that ‘A commitment to human rights and humanitarian law is the foundation for building human security. Human security is advanced in every country by protecting and promoting human rights, the rule of law, democratic governance and democratic structures, a culture of peace and the peaceful resolution of conflicts.’
- 12 This is a war crime under the *Statute of the International Criminal Court* when it involves children ‘under the age of fifteen years’ (UNGA, 1998, art. 8.2.e.vii). However, as a number of institutions reporting on the subject do, the Small Arms Survey uses the definition contained in the *Optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict*, which sets 18 as the cut-off age (UNGA, 2000, art. 4).
- 13 Under the *Statute of the International Criminal Court*, the ‘deportation or forcible transfer of population’ is a crime against humanity (UNGA, 1998, art. 7.1.d) and ‘ordering the displacement of the civilian

ARMED AND AIMLESS

---

population' is a war crime (UNGA, 1998, art. 8.2.e.viii). However, this study uses the available international agency and NGO displacement figures that may not always correspond to this particular definition.

14 These include crimes against humanity and war crimes as defined in UNGA (1998, arts. 7 and 8).

## Bibliography

- Berman, Eric G. and Katie E. Sams. 2003. 'The Peacekeeping Potential of African Regional Organisations.' In Jane Boulden, ed. *Dealing with Conflict in Africa: The United Nations and Regional Organisations*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 43–49.
- Ebo, Adedeji, with Laura Mazal. 2003. *Small Arms Control in West Africa*. West Africa series No. 1. London: Security and Peacebuilding Programme, International Alert. October. Accessed March 2004  
<[http://www.international-alert.org/pdf/pubsec/MISAC\\_west\\_africa\\_english.pdf](http://www.international-alert.org/pdf/pubsec/MISAC_west_africa_english.pdf)>
- HSN (Human Security Network). 1999. *A Perspective on Human Security: Chairman's Summary 1st Ministerial Meeting of the Human Security Network*. Lysøen, Norway. 20 May. Accessed January 2005.  
<<http://www.humansecuritynetwork.org/menu-e.php>> and  
<<http://www.humansecuritynetwork.org/principles-e.php>>
- Policzer, Pablo. 2004. 'Neither Terrorists nor Freedom Fighters.' Paper presented at the American Political Science Association Conference, Chicago, 2–5 September.  
<<http://www.armedgroups.org/images/stories/pdfs/policzer%20neither%20terrorist%20nor%20freedom%20fighters.pdf>>
- Poulton, Robin-Edward and Ibrahim ag Youssouf. 1998. *A Peace of Timbuktu: Democratic Governance, Development and African Peacemaking*. UNIDIR/98/2. Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research.
- Small Arms Survey. 2003. *Small Arms Survey 2003: Development Denied*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- UNGA (United Nations General Assembly). 1997. *Report of the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms*. A/52/298 of 27 August.
- . 1998. *Statute of the International Criminal Court*. A/CONF.183/9 of 17 July.
- . 2000. *Optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict*. A/RES/54/263 of 25 May.