

Edited by Nicolas Florquin and Eric G. Berman

ARMED AND AIMLESS:

ARMED GROUPS, GUNS, AND HUMAN SECURITY IN THE ECOWAS REGION



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Commissioned by



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The Small Arms Survey is an independent research project located at the Graduate Institute of International Studies. It serves as the principal source of public information on all aspects of small arms for governments, policy-makers, researchers, and activists.

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FOREWORD

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has long grappled with the ruinous effects that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons has had on its citizens. It has been estimated that more than eight million firearms are in circulation in our region and that most of these are used not to promote peace and security, but rather are in the hands of armed groups such as insurgents as well as those who engage in illicit activities including organized crime, drug trafficking, illegal exploitation of natural resources and terrorism. The scourge has had profound ramifications for economic, social, and political development.

Our Member States are working tirelessly and effectively to address the challenges of small arms proliferation. The government of Mali, for example, began a dialogue with rebel groups that resulted in a peaceful resolution of long-standing tensions and the destruction of thousands of weapons. Subsequently, the ECOWAS Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation, and Manufacture of Light Weapons in West Africa was concluded and a Programme of Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development (PCASED) undertaken to support the ground-breaking initiative. ECOWAS Heads of State and Government also approved a Code of Conduct to facilitate progress and accountability. The ECOWAS Small Arms Control Programme (ECOSAP), which has succeeded PCASED, is yet another example of the region's commitment.

ECOWAS and its Member States recognize the important role that civil society organizations—both within the region and abroad—play in assisting governments to meet their objectives. This study, which Mali initiated and that the ECOWAS Secretariat supported, is an important example of what can be achieved when people and governments work together toward a common goal. It raises numerous concerns that merit additional study such as the need to place greater emphasis on more rigorous stockpile management so that legal transfers of arms do not fall into the hands of criminals and rebels. The study also warns that groups armed by the state ostensibly for its defence can often unintentionally undermine peace and security.

The scope of the report is ambitious and raises many interesting points worthy of further study. I hope that this initiative will help develop good policies and draw attention to the challenges we and our citizens face—and support for our continuous efforts to address them.

Dr Mohamed Ibn Chambas

Executive Secretary

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